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The Two Detectives;

OR,

The Fortunes of a Bowery Girl.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
AUTHOR OF "OVERLAND KIT," "ROCKY MOUNTAIN BOB,"
"KENTUCK, THE SPORT," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE GIRL OF THE STREETS.

"Don't you dare to strike me!"

A girlish voice high in anger and fierce in determination.

The scene, an underground drinking-saloon known as "The Dive," situated on the Bowery, not a dozen blocks from Canal street, in the great city of New York; the time, night; the hour, twelve, and the actors in the scene—we will describe them.

In the center of the saloon, which was but a common basement, fitted up with a bar and a half a dozen small tables, stood a girl about sixteen years of age. She was slight in figure, with a pale face, lit up by great black eyes, that now were flashing bright with angry fires. Great masses of silken hair, black as the diamonds of the Pennsylvania mines, and soft as the fleece of the merino, gathered in a simple knot at the back of her well-shaped head.

The face of the girl was white with passion; her bosom was heaving tumultuously, and the warm breath came quickly through the dilated nostrils. The full red lips, almost perfect in their beauty, were firmly shut together.

One passion alone swayed all her nature—anger!

Within a few feet of the girl stood the person to whom she had addressed her passionate warning. It was a man—an Italian, as one gifted in reading nationalities in the face would have guessed at once. The olive complexion, full black eyes, and crisp, curly hair of inky hue, told his race.

The Italian was a man of forty-five, dressed roughly, and an evil look lurked in the lines of his dark face.

Now, his swarthy features were convulsed with anger, and his hand was raised, as if to strike the girl to his feet.

Two persons alone, besides the girl and the Italian, were in the saloon. One a woman, an Italian like the man, who stood behind the bar, leaning

her elbows on the counter, and gazing upon the angry pair in the center of the room, with an expression of careless unconcern upon her olive-tinted features. The other was a man of that peculiar class, common to the great metropolis, and whom the world places under the generic head of "rough."

This man was sitting on a corner of one of the tables, swinging his legs carelessly, and smoking a cigar. He was dressed in a flashy light suit; a heavy chain—looking remarkably like gold—although it wasn't—dangled over his vest. In his ruffled shirt-bosom gleamed a huge pin; had it been a diamond, a "cool" thousand dollars would not have bought it; but, as it was only an imitation, a ten-dollar bill had paid for it.

The rough had a coarse, brutal face—bull-dog;

that expresses it. A thick nose, broken evidently by some heavy blow; sinister-looking eyes, an ugly gray in color; coarse black hair, cropped tight to his head; a gigantic mustache, rusty black in hue, half-concealing the thick-lipped, sensual mouth, and you have the pen picture of Mr. Richard Hill, better known to his intimate friends—and the police—as Rocky Hill; a bully and a blackguard of the first water—a bright and shining light among the shoulder-hitters of Gotham.

"Why I no strike you, eh?" angrily demanded the Italian, who was called Giacomo, and was the proprietor of the little den known as "The Dive." By long custom the Bowery boys had abbreviated the name of the saloon-keeper into "Jocky."

"Because if you do, it will be the worst blow you ever struck in all your life, you bet!" replied the girl, defiantly.

"Better look out, Jocky; she's red-hot!" cried the rough, who was enjoying the display of temper, as he would have enjoyed a dog-fight or any thing else brutal.

"You one cussed beggar!" exclaimed the Italian, gesticulating wildly. "You no do vat I wish; *diavolo!* I will kill you dead!"

"I'm no beggar, Jocky!" returned the girl, in a passion. "I work hard for every crust of bread that you give me, you old miser! I won't be struck any more. I don't care what I do; the cops can take me as soon as they like; I'll give 'em something to take me for, too, if you go for to strike me again. I'm all black and blue now. I'd just as lief be dead as stop here with you. Who gave you the right to beat me? You ain't my father. I never had no father, and I don't care much."

"Oh! you imp of ze devil!" cried the Italian, in wrath. "I pick you out of ze mud-gutter, bring you up like a lady; give you beautiful clothes, and you no do as I tole you!"

"I ain't a-goin to steal for anybody!" cried the girl, quickly. "You dress me like a lady! beautiful clothes! This is a gay dress, this is!" And the girl surveyed the ragged gown that she wore, in contempt. "See here, Jocky, I've always acted square with you! I never went back on you; I always give you, fair, just what I sell. I never say that I lost some of my money, like the rest of the girls do. All I ask is decent treatment. I ain't a dog to be banged about. I wish I was a dog, sometimes; then I'd run away."



"ALL RIGHT, SONNY; GO AHEAD," PETERS SAID, PLACING HIS FOOT UPON THE BOX.

"Why don't you run away, now?" asked Rocky, with a leer upon his brutal face.

"Where could I run to?" cried the girl, desperately. "Wouldn't Jocky, here, run after me and bring me back? There's only one thing for me to do."

"What's that?" asked Rocky.

"Jump into the dock. I'd do it, too, if I wasn't such a coward. Maybe I will, soon, for I ain't a-going to stand such a life as this much longer," and the girl sighed heavily as she spoke.

"Oh, you are ze imp of ze devil!" cried the Italian. "Why you no do as I tell you, eh?"

"I won't be a thief for anybody!" cried the girl. "Ain't it bad enough for to make me tramp the streets all day and nearly all night, selling your mean shoe-strings, and hair-pins and buttons, without trying to make me do something that'll send me to the Tombs and up to the Island? Maybe it would be better for me to go there; I'd be out of your reach anyway. But first and last, I won't steal for you, nor nobody else!"

"Oh, you're a sweet one, you are!" exclaimed Rocky, in a tone expressive of the highest contempt. "Why don't you preach us a sermon, now? Why, we ought to go right down on our blessed knees and worship such an angel as you are. Oh, my! ain't you cutting it fat, or nothing! You're giving us altogether too much pork for a shilling. Just think, Jocky, she's a-cutting up all this rumpus, 'cos I told her for to just slyly slip a bundle out of a woman's basket as she was a-follerin' on behind. Nobody would have see'd her; but she's a virtuous kid, she is!"

"Did I no tell you, you must do as Rocky say, eh?" cried the Italian, approaching still nearer to the girl with upraised hand.

The girl did not shrink from him in the least. "I told you that I wouldn't and I didn't!" she replied, defiantly, her face plainly showing the angry passions raging in her heart.

"That's so!" cried Rocky.

"You no mind me, beggar, eh?"

"No!"

Like angry tigers, the two glared at each other with flaming eyes—the muscular, swarthy-faced man of forty, and the slight, pale-faced girl of sixteen.

Rocky looked on in delight; the woman leaning on the counter—the wife of Jocky—with unconcern.

"Hi, hi!" ejaculated the rough, "why this is as good as a the-a-ter; oncore, oncore!" and he clapped his hands together in huge delight.

"You mud-gutter imp! did I not look out for you since you was a little child, so high as my knee? and now you no do what I want?" cried the Italian, foaming at the mouth with rage, and the big veins on his forehead and throat purple with angry blood.

"Oh, you've done a great deal for me, you have, you bet!" exclaimed the girl, contemptuously. "Ever since I could walk, I've worked all I knew how for you. I've earned every bit of bread that I've put in my mouth, twice over. And what have I ever got from you, except just enough to keep life in me? a gay life it has been, too!" and the girl laughed bitterly. "But now, I'm tired of being beaten; I'm too old for that, and don't you dare to strike me again! I'll work for you; work as hard as I know how to; but, I won't steal for you. I don't know much, but I do know that it ain't right, and I won't do it."

"You no do it, eh?"

"No, I won't, Jocky; it's played out!" cried the girl, firmly.

The child of the streets used the language of the class who had surrounded her from childhood. It was more forcible than elegant.

"Diavolo! I kill you, some!" exclaimed the Italian, making a terrible blow at her, that, had it fallen on the girl, would surely have felled her senseless to the floor. But the street life of the orphan had made her as quick as a cat. Anticipating the blow, she dodged under the arm of the Italian, and as he was carried past her by the force of his blow, she turned quickly and struck him with all the force of her clenched fist.

The blow took the Italian just under the right ear and sent him reeling across the room, despite his size and weight.

Nerved as she was to desperation, the girl's strength was doubled.

"Bully for you!" yelled Rocky, in delight. "Round first! the old 'un gets a hot 'un under the ear. Round two, come to scratch, Jocky; time!"

The Italian staggered across the room, impelled by the violence of the blow he had received from the determined arm of the girl, until he brought up against the wall; that alone prevented him from falling.

Half stunned by the blow, for it had lighted

on a tender spot, Jocky felt of his neck in wonder. He could hardly realize that the slight figure of the girl could command strength to deal such a stroke.

"Diavolo!" the Italian cried, in a rage. "Time!" yelled Rocky, in glee; "come up smiling, Jocky, or I'll throw up the sponge!"

Then the Italian seemed suddenly to understand what had happened. He drew a long, glittering knife from his bosom, and darted toward the girl.

CHAPTER II.

UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

In the handsomely-furnished parlor of a brown-stone front mansion on East Thirty-first street sat two men; one, old, the other, young.

The old man was short and thick-set in build. His face was a peculiar one; the skin was yellow and tightly drawn over the bones; the eyes, gray in color, and sharp as the orbs of a hawk, were never still, but restlessly roamed from object to object; a thick mass of stubby, iron-gray hair crowned the head; the face was smoothly shaven.

The old man was called Obadiah Oilkoff, a retired merchant, whose name on "change" was once good for a hundred thousand dollars.

What the retired merchant was really worth was, probably, known only to himself alone; yet the world guessed that, by sagacious calculation and prudent investment, the ex-merchant had so increased the wealth made in trade that he could write his check for two hundred thousand dollars, at the least, and have it honored.

The young man, who sat before the merchant, and by the look upon his face reminded one of a criminal waiting for the judge's sentence, was nephew to Obadiah, and called Algernon Oilkoff.

The young man was about twenty-five years old. In his face he bore no resemblance whatever to his uncle. His features were weak and unimpressive. In a crowd no one would have taken him for a hero. His blue eyes lacked fire; the scanty yellow mustache, struggling for existence on his upper lip, seemed like a type of the character of its owner—feeble and uncertain.

One point Mr. Algernon Oilkoff had in his favor. He was superbly dressed. The skill of his tailor was plainly evident in the clothes that adorned his person. The "cut" could not be excelled; it was perfection itself.

"You sent for me, sir?" the nephew asked, in a tone wherein abasement and fear were blended. It was evident that the young man had just entered the room.

"Yes, sir," replied the old man, sharply. The contrast between the languid tones of the nephew and the sharp, metallic voice of the uncle was great.

"What is it, sir?" Algernon asked, and from his manner one could easily guess that he felt very far from being comfortable.

"How much do you owe?" asked the old man, abruptly.

"Owe, sir!" stammered Algernon, in confusion.

"Yes, sir; didn't I speak plain enough? How much do you owe?"

"I—I really don't know," the young man muttered, in utter confusion.

"Oh!" there was a great deal of meaning in the simple exclamation, so dryly uttered, and Algernon trembled in his gorgeous patent-leathers as he heard it.

"You owe so much, I suppose, that you cannot carry the figures in your head. Hadn't you better have a clerk to assist you in ascertaining the amount?" the uncle continued, sarcastically.

"Oh, sir, it's not that," Algernon muttered, in haste.

"Then the debt is so small that you don't trouble your head about it, eh?"

"Well, I—really—" and the nephew paused in sad embarrassment.

"Ah, perhaps you wonder why I should put such a question to you, and how I come to have any information on the subject. I received a slight bill of yours this morning; your tailor's bill," and as he spoke the old man drew an envelope from his pocket; opening it he produced the bill. "Your tailor must be like the Irishman's snipe—all bill," and the uncle chuckled dryly, as he spoke. "You owe him the modest sum of two hundred and ten dollars. That is for your spring outfit, I suppose. When I was your age, sir, fifty dollars a year would have been an extravagant sum for me to have paid for clothing. But I worked hard and earned my money—you understand, I earned my money," and he shook his finger, expressively, in his nephew's face. "I didn't have any rich uncle to foot my bills for me. This tailor of yours sent this bill

in an envelope addressed to me. Of course, I understand. He looked in the directory, found my name—same residence—naturally thought that I was your father. Hadn't an idea, of course, that I was only your uncle. Now, then, what are you going to do about this bill?"

"I—I don't know," Algernon stammered, in blank dismay.

"How many times already have I paid your debts?" asked the old man, suddenly.

"Really, sir, I—" and again the hopeful nephew broke down.

"Three different times, sir!" exclaimed the uncle. "You see I remember, if you do not. I suppose you think I will pay them again, eh?"

"It is almost too much to expect, sir," began Algernon, but the uncle cut him short.

"But you do expect it!" he cried. "You will not be deceived. I shall pay your debts once more."

The face of Algernon brightened up.

"But, it is for the last time."

Algernon looked astonished.

"I sent for you that we might have a little serious conversation together," the old man said, gravely. "You know I am thought to be wealthy?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have doubtless fancied that, as you are the only living relative I have in the world, you will be my heir."

"My dear uncle, I am sure that I have never thought of such an event as your death," Algernon hastened to say. "Such a calamity would—"

"Now, don't be gushing, young man; it don't become you. You have no idea how much you resemble a dying calf when you try to be sentimental," interrupted the old man.

Algernon subsided.

"As I said before, you expected to become my heir. I deem it my duty to tell you that there is not the slightest possibility of such an event happening."

Algernon looked at his uncle in blank amazement. His brain was bewildered. For the life of him he couldn't understand what his uncle meant.

"You are silent—you don't understand, of course. It's natural; how could you be expected to understand?" the uncle exclaimed. "But I'll make it all plain to you. As I said before, I'll pay these debts of yours; perhaps give you a few hundred dollars to help you on in the world; but, after that, expect no further assistance from me. Of course you are welcome to a home in my house as long as I live, for you are my brother's child; but money assistance, no. Possibly you wish to know the reason of this sudden determination?"

"Yes, sir; if you do not object," replied Algernon, timidly. It was a riddle he could not solve.

"The reason is, that I think it my duty to preserve my property for my heir," said the old man, gravely.

"Your heir, sir!" exclaimed the young man, opening his eyes wide in astonishment.

"Yes, sir; my heir," replied the uncle, firmly.

"But I always understood, sir, that I was the only relative that you had in the world."

The mind of the young man was in a fog.

"Exactly; and I have no doubt that it will greatly surprise you when you hear that I expect the arrival of my daughter daily."

"Your daughter!" cried the nephew in blank amazement.

"Yes, sir; my daughter." The old man was enjoying the surprise of the nephew.

"But, sir, I never knew that you had a daughter," Algernon said, utterly confounded.

"Very likely; but I have a daughter, nevertheless, as you shall see with your own eyes before you are many days older," Obadiah said, dryly.

"But, uncle, I never knew that you had been married. I never heard you speak of it."

"Ah, yes; one forgets those little things once in a while, you know," and again the dry chuckle was in the voice of the old man.

Algernon felt the blow severely. All his life he had looked forward to being his uncle's heir. He had never dreamed of the possibility of any one snatching his inheritance from him. But now, the golden dream had vanished, and black despair stared him in the face.

"I have acquainted you with this knowledge, that you might prepare to fight the world on your own hook. As I said before, you can always have a home here, but no more," the old man said, finding that Algernon did not reply.

"I am very much obliged for that, sir," replied the nephew, dreamily. And as he spoke he rose as if to leave the room.

"Oh, by the way!" exclaimed the uncle, in his sharp, restless way; "I've got something else to say to you; wait a minute."

"Yes, sir!"

For a moment the old man gazed at the floor, and stroked his face thoughtfully.

"It's about Miss Blake!" the uncle said, suddenly.

The young man stared and seemed confused.

"I have noticed that you and Miss Blake seem to be very fond of each other's society. I have never spoken about Miss Blake to you before, but I will now. Her father was a sea-captain in my employ. He died abroad in the Chinese seas, murdered by pirates while protecting my ship and goods from the villains. He gave up his life, like the good and honest man that he was, to protect his employer's interest. He left a wife and child. I couldn't go to that widowed woman and helpless little one, and say: 'Here's a thousand dollars—or more; your support, your all, died for me; let that pay for him.' No; I can't supply the loss of a husband and a father. I did the best I could. I took Mrs. Blake and her child into my family, which consisted of myself, solely. Mrs. Blake took the whole charge of my household. When she died, her daughter took her place. I look upon that daughter as being almost as dear to me as my own child. Therefore, sir, no nonsense with that girl. She's too good for you—not your style at all. She wants a *man* for a husband; you've been very little better than a tailor's sign all your life. You understand? No nonsense!"

"No, sir," and Algernon left the room, anger and despair swelling in his heart.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE SCENT.

On the corner of Canal street and the Bowery stood a man plainly dressed in dark clothes. He was a smallish, stoutly-built fellow, with short, curly hair of a yellow tinge, and a cool, clear gray eye.

The man was whistling softly to himself, as he waited on the corner; for waiting for some one he evidently was. Not a man, woman or child passed by him and escaped the notice of the shrewd gray eyes.

"Well, he's precious long," he muttered, impatiently. "I wonder if he's hit off the scent? Perhaps he's been more lucky than I have. Finding a needle in a bundle of hay is a fool to *this* job. But I won't say 'die' yet. We may get the clew, just by accident. This is the third day we've been at it. A bond-robber couldn't give more trouble."

Again the detective—for the man waiting on the corner was the celebrated detective, John Peters, reputed to be one of the keenest detectives in the country—commenced to whistle.

Then a man came up the Bowery, crossed Canal street, and approached the detective.

The new-comer was a tall, lank person, with short yellow hair, and a rough-looking, honest face, whereon was an expression of great simplicity. One would have guessed him to be some countryman fresh from the rural districts. And yet this seemingly guileless youth was Peters' partner, Henry Henry, more commonly called Hank Henry—a detective officer with a reputation second to none other in the country.

"What luck, Hank?" asked Peters, as the other approached.

"None!" the officer replied. One peculiarity about the countrified detective was, that he seldom used many words. His speech was laconic and terse to a degree.

"By thunder! the luck is against us!" Peters exclaimed.

"Have you failed too?"

"Yes; I couldn't discover any trace of the girl."

"What's the programme now?"

"Well, I hardly know. I think we have examined every saloon on the Bowery, from Division street to Canal."

"I think we have," Hank rejoined.

"The clew is such a faulty one. The party forgot the name of the saloon and the exact location, but as near as he could remember the direction, it was on the Bowery near Canal street."

"Perhaps it's above Canal street?" Hank observed.

"Maybe so, partner," Peters replied; "tomorrow we'll give our attention to all the saloons above here. The party is willing to come down handsomely, and we'll stick to it while there's a hope left of discovering the person."

"You've got the description?"

"Yes; all correct."

"Peters, I've got an idea!" cried Hank, suddenly.

"What is it?"

"This party we're after is in the street a good deal. She ought to be known to the bootblacks, newsboys, etc. Suppose we pump them; we might tumble onto the girl just by accident."

"That's a good idea, Hank!" cried Peters.

"We'll try it on right away. Let's look at the description."

Then the detective took a memorandum-book from his pocket, opened it, and read aloud:

"Girl about fifteen or sixteen; jet-black eyes and hair; hair worn in a knot behind. Rather tall, slender figure. Complexion fair. Peculiar hands. Long, slender fingers. Poorly dressed. Deep, musical voice. Face rather pretty and ladylike. Looks above her station. Sells small articles on the Bowery. Lives in a basement saloon on the Bowery, above Canal street. Mem.—Doubt about being above Canal street; may be below."

"There; that's the description, and all the particulars known about the girl. It's getting late, but as we're like the birds we hunt down—only in our ways—it don't make much difference. The first boy we see we'll go for."

And even as the detective spoke, a shrill voice at his side cried out:

"Black your boots, sir?—shine 'em up nice—only five cents!"

The detective looked down and beheld a wee little fellow, dressed in a ragged suit, with a coat much too big for him, that hung from his neck to his heels. A round, almost shapeless hat covered his head. From under the hat came tangled, curly masses of bright red hair. Keen little blue eyes, as bright as the eyes of a rat, peered out from amid the elfish curls that clustered on his forehead. His face was ornamented with streaks of dirt that almost hid the true color of the skin. For such a little urchin, the boy had an enormous mouth. He seemed a happy, contented little beggar, for his thin face was bright with a cheerful smile, and his shrewd eyes twinkled like two tiny stars as he looked up into the face of the detective.

"Jes' lemme black 'em, boss; make 'em shine, now, so you kin see yer face in 'em!" the boy urged, as he unsling his box from his shoulder, and planted it persuasively by the foot of Peters.

"All right, sonny; go ahead," Peters said, placing his foot upon the box.

The boy unpacked his kit and proceeded to operate on the boot.

"What's your name, bub?" the detective asked.

"Shrimpy, sir," the boy answered, rubbing industriously at the boot.

"Shrimpy, eh? Why, that's a queer name."

"Yes, bos; I 'spect I was called it 'cos I'm a little cuss," said the boy, cheerfully.

"Where do you live?"

"Round in spots."

"No particular home, eh?"

"No; I jes' lay 'round loose."

"Do you travel on the Bowery, here?"

"Yes; this is my stampin' ground," the boy replied.

"Doing pretty well now?"

"Only middlin'; times ain't wot they used to be; biz is dull," and as he talked he worked away industriously on the boot.

"I suppose you know all the rounders that travel on the Bowery?"

"Well, I guess I do," the boy replied, confidently.

"Do you know a girl about sixteen, black hair and eyes, who sells little things, like shoestrings and buttons, on the Bowery?" the detective asked, carelessly.

The boy paused in his work and cast a shrewd glance in the face of the man.

"Wot do you want to know fur?"

"Oh, only for fun," Peters replied.

"Well, I don't know any gal like that," the boy said, slowly, and he commenced operations on the other boot.

"My young friend, did you ever go to school?" asked the detective, quietly.

"Yes; an' I were a glad to git out, 'cos it was dull to hear the cove up in the box a talkin'," the boy replied, truthfully.

"Then you don't know what will happen to you if you tell a lie?"

"Yes, I do," replied Shrimpy, quickly.

"Oh, you do?"

"You bet! I told a lie 'bout a feller once, an' he cotched me and walloped me, 'cos he was bigger nor I was, an' I didn't have no show for to get hunky with him."

"You lied to me just now, when you said you didn't know the girl I asked about," Peters said, sternly.

Shrimpy looked up in the face of the detective, with a frightened look upon his thin features.

"Well, I ain't a-goin' for to get a cove in trouble," the boy said, with a snifle.

"Oh, you know me, then?"

"In course I does. You're a *de-tective*. I see'd you one Fourth of July, on Broadway, when you jammed a feller's head through a window 'cos he fired a pistol at you."

"Now, my young friend, you have made a great mistake in one thing; though I am a *de-tective*, I don't intend any harm to this girl, but a great deal of good. There's a friend of mine who is very eager to find the girl and reward her for a service she did him. I have a suspicion that you know where the girl is to be found. It may not be the one that I want, though; but I am willing to pay something to find out whether it is or not."

"If it's all square," said the boy, again proceeding to polish the boot.

"It is; I give you my word for that," said the detective, gravely.

"How does she look?" Shrimpy asked.

Peters took the memorandum out of his pocket, and read the description aloud.

"That's Lill," the boy said, when Peters had finished.

"Lill?"

"Yes, the 'Bowery Gal'; that's wot everybody calls her. She's a reg'lar stunner, she is!" cried Shrimpy, enthusiastically.

"You know where she lives?" said Peters, eagerly.

"Yes; she lives with Jocky, down in the 'Dive.'"

"How far from here is that?"

"Only a little way; I'll take you right there, if you want me to," replied the boy, giving the boot the finishing touches.

"I'll give you a twenty-five cent stamp for your trouble if you will," Peters said.

"I'm very much 'bliged to you, 'cos I want to raise stamps enough to get me a spring suit," replied the boy, with a glance at his ragged coat.

"But, I say, you ain't a-comin' any gum-game, is you?" the boy asked, rising to his feet, with a look of distrust upon his sharp features.

"No; that's honest. I don't mean the girl any ill?"

"'Cos I wouldn't go back on a feller I know; 'tain't square," Shrimpy said, with a wise shake of the head.

"You're a little man; but go on," the detective remarked.

The boy led the way down the Bowery, while the two detectives followed in the rear.

Five minutes' walk and the three descended the steps that led into the saloon known as "The Dive."

CHAPTER IV.

IN "THE DIVE."

With the keen-edged knife glittering in his hand, the Italian, mad with rage, rushed toward the girl.

The rough, seated on the table, and the woman, leaning on the bar, looked on calmly, without stirring a finger to protect the girl, or to save her from the death that seemed so near.

But, as the Italian struck at her, with the quickness of a cat, she jumped to one side, thus evading the murderous stroke. And, as the Italian turned, as if to repeat the rush, she caught up a chair, which stood near at hand. With a strength which one would not have suspected to have dwelt in her slight frame, she whirled the chair over her head and brought it down with terrible force upon the Italian. Jocky threw up his arms to guard his head. The force of the blow hurled him headlong to the floor; but little injured though, for his arms had saved his skull.

The girl then retreated a few steps, still grasping the chair in her hands; still prepared for another attack.

"Set 'em up ag'in!" cried Rocky, in huge delight. "Round two: the old 'un goes to grass. Round three: *time*!"

But the Italian slowly rose to his feet, and showed but little inclination to again renew the attack. The desperation of the girl astonished him.

"*Diavolo!* you have broke my head!" he cried, in anger.

"Why don't you let me alone, now?" exclaimed the maid, still keeping herself prepared for another assault. Her face deadly white, and the full, red lips shut tightly together.

"Time, Jocky!" shouted the rough; "you ain't a-goin' to 'give it up so, Mr. Brown, are you?"

"You better let me alone!" the girl cried, her eyes flashing, and her whole manner showing the desperation born of despair.

"Go for her, Jocky!" Rocky exclaimed. "Are you going for to let a girl back you down? Pretty sort of a rooster, you are! I wouldn't bet my stamps on you, nohow." The rough was disgusted, and expressed his feelings in his tone.

"Put down ze chair, you imp of ze devil!" the Italian cried, cautiously advancing toward the still defiant girl.

"I won't!" she answered. "I give you fair warning that, if you attempt to strike me, I'll hit you with it again." In the eye of the girl the Italian read that she would keep her word, or, at least, attempt to do so.

"Come, Jocky, the audience is a-gettin' impatient!" exclaimed the rough. "If you ain't a-goin' to put up your bunch of fives, you'd better throw up the sponge and quit to onc't. I'd be ashamed for to have a girl back me down, I would!"

"If you no put down ze chair, *diavolo!* I will kill you!" cried the Italian, fiercely.

"You tried it on onc't, and you didn't do it!" the girl replied, still defiant. "You better not try it again. You've got my temper up, an' I had just as lief die now as not. This ends you and me. I don't stay here no more!"

The girl made a movement toward the door, but the Italian quickly anticipated her motion and placed himself before it.

"You no go!" he cried, in rage.

"Well, now, this is interesting," said the rough, complacently. "Now hit him over the head with the cheer, 'cos you can't git out till you do."

"What! you tell her to hit me over ze head viz ze chair?" cried the Italian, in astonishment.

"In course; what a feller you are, for to want to spile the fun!" said the rough, in an aggrieved tone.

"Rocky, I gives you one dollar to take ze chair away from this devil's imp!" exclaimed the Italian, glaring upon the girl.

"A dollar! Now you're talkin'. I'm your man!" and Rocky got off the table.

"Don't you dare to come near me!" the maid cried, fiercely, retreating, and placing her back against the wall as she spoke.

"You jes' teach your grandmother to milk ducks," said the rough, with a grin. "You jes' put down that cheer, or I'll walk into you, lively, now. You can't skeer me!" And as he spoke, he slowly approached the girl.

"Keep away!" she cried, every muscle in her body trembling with excitement.

"Take ze chair, den I kill her, some!" exclaimed the Italian.

"Oh, jes' look at me now," said Rocky, shaking his head with a knowing air. "See me astonish her weak nerves."

Then the rough made a sudden dart forward, as if intending to seize the girl. With desperate force she brought the chair down, intending to fell the rough as she had made the Italian seek the floor; but the wily Rocky knew a trick worth two of that, for, as the chair descended, he suddenly darted back and avoided the blow. Then, before she could again raise the clumsy weapon that stern necessity had forced upon her hands, he seized it, wrested it from her hands, and sent it spinning across the floor.

The Italian uttered a shrill cry of triumph. The child was helpless in his hands.

"All done by the turn of the wrist!" exclaimed Rocky. "Old man, I'll trouble you for to fork over that dollar."

With white face, flaming eyes, and lips quivering with passion, the girl stood; her little fists tightly clenched, as though, even now, she was prepared to do battle with her enemies.

The door against which Jocky was standing was opened suddenly. As it turned into the room, the force of the concussion pitched the Italian forward into the saloon.

The girl started with joy. In the appearance of the strangers she saw a chance of escape.

Through the doorway came the two detectives, Peters and Henry, followed by the boot-black, known as Shrimpy.

The keen eye of Peters took in the details of the scene at once. The Italian, with the long, glittering knife in his hand; the girl pale with passion; and the rough, with an ugly scowl upon his brutal face, produced there by the sudden appearance of the strangers, told plainly that they had entered at an opportune moment.

"Hallo! what's the trouble?" Peters asked, in his quiet way.

"What's that to you?" demanded Rocky roughly.

"And who trod on you, young man?" asked Peters, knitting his brows.

"See here, we don't want no talk out of you; you jes' git!" cried Rocky, in anger.

"Have you bought your coffin?" asked Hank, stretching his brawny arms out, carelessly, and approaching the rough.

Rocky measured Hank with his eye; took in the muscular power that evidently laid in the well-developed sinews of the detective's powerful frame, and slowly retreated toward the bar, as if in search of a weapon.

"What ze devil you want here, eh?" asked the Italian, in surly anger. He was not pleased with the appearance of the strangers, and guessed that they were intent on mischief.

"Well, our wants are easily explained and easily satisfied," Peters said, quietly. "In the first place we want this girl."

Had a bombshell exploded in that underground saloon it could hardly have created more excitement.

The rough stared; the Italian uttered a fearful oath; the girl took a step forward, with clasped hands, and even the wife of the Italian, behind the counter, manifested some emotion.

"You want zis girl?" the Italian demanded, in wonder.

"That's the programme!" Peters replied coolly.

"You can't have her!" cried Rocky, defiantly.

"Gorgeous individual, just you keep your oar out until you're asked to row," said the detective, provokingly.

"Look a-here, now; you'll git hurt afore you kin git out of this now!" cried Rocky, in indignant warning.

"I wonder how thick this wall is here?" said Peters, interrogatively. "Do you think it would damage it much if you knocked that fellow through it into the next basement?"

"S'pose I try," and Hank made a step toward Rocky.

The rough seized the heavy water-pitcher that stood on the counter.

"Now, you jes' keep away!" he cried in anger.

"You take my child away? *Diavolo!*" exclaimed the Italian.

"Your child! How long since?" asked Peters in contempt.

"Oh, don't believe him, sir; I ain't his child!" cried the girl, quickly. "He's called me a beggar's brat every so many times, and, jes' as you came in now, he swore he was a-goin' to kill me!"

"She tell one big lie!" exclaimed the Italian.

"Don't you believe him, sir. It ain't a lie: it's the truth, sir!" protested the girl.

Peters took the memorandum-book from his pocket and glanced over the description of the girl he was in search of.

"She answers to it," he muttered. "I say, my girl, did you tell a gentleman on the Bowery a few days ago where you lived?"

"Yes, sir," answered the girl, eagerly.

"Then you're the one I want."

"You want my child! You no take her!" cried the Italian.

"Don't talk so much with your mouth!" said Hank, tersely, to the Italian.

"Don't you let 'em take her away, Jocky!" cried the rough. "Putty piece of business for to take a man's own gal away!"

"Do you want to go with us?" Peters asked, addressing the girl.

"Yes," she answered, eagerly. "I would rather die than stay here. I'll go anywhere with you. Jocky, here, allers beats me, but I made up my mind to-night that he shouldn't beat me any more, and when he tried to, I knocked him down first with my fist, and then with the chair," said the girl, proudly.

Peters looked at her in astonishment. The detective had met with many strange characters in his career; but this girl was something out of the common run of the Arabs of the street.

"She no go!" cried the Italian, fiercely. "She my child! I no let her go. You take her away I s'all call ze police—put you in ze Tombs, *diavolo!*"

"That's right; stick to it, Jocky!" said the rough, encouragingly. "Who are these two fellers, I'd like for to know, that come to take away an honest man's girl!"

The Italian had hid his knife away at the commencement of the conversation, and now, with both hands outstretched, he sprang forward as if to seize the girl, but he stopped suddenly in his onward motion, for the girl, with flashing eyes and clenched teeth, drew back her arm as if to strike. The Italian had felt the force of her little knuckles once before and did not care to encounter them again.

At the same moment, Rocky, brandishing the water-pitcher, sprang forward and placed himself before the door, thus barring all exit from the saloon.

CHAPTER V.

THE VIRGINIAN COLONEL.

AFTER the interview with his uncle, Algernon slowly proceeded up-stairs.

The brain of the young man was in a whirl. He could hardly realize that the interview which had just taken place was not all a dream.

"This is really delightful news!" he muttered. "It's a brilliant look-out ahead for me. I've always thought that I was safe to come in for a cool hundred thousand at the least. Oh, this is pleasant!"

At the head of the stairs, he met Miss Blake. She was just coming down as he was going up.

Dorothy Blake, or Dolly Blake, as all in the Ollkoff household called her, was a pretty, lady-like girl of two and twenty; a round face, clear red and white complexion, and dark-brown eyes and hair.

"Hallo, Dolly!" cried the young man, "I've some news for you."

"For me?" the girl asked, looking with a pleasant smile into the face of her lover; for that was the position that the young man held in regard to her.

Old Ollkoff had made a shrewd guess at the truth.

Dolly Blake and Algernon Ollkoff had been brought up together from childhood. Naturally they had fallen in love with each other.

"Yes," Algernon said, replying to the girl's question. "I've just had a few minutes' talk with my uncle. In the first place, he 'pitched' into me on account of my extravagance, as he calls it, and told me that in the future I mustn't expect any thing from him."

"Oh! how cruel!"

"Well, rather; then he further informed me that he expected his daughter would soon arrive."

"His daughter!" cried Dolly, in astonishment.

"Exactly; you're astonished of course. I know I was," said Algernon, grimly.

"But I never heard him speak of a daughter before!"

"No, nor anybody else. You can judge how astonished I was. But the old gentleman was in sober earnest. His manner told pretty plain that he wasn't joking. So, you see, my nose is out of joint."

"Oh! how dreadful!" and the girl looked pathetically, into the face of Algernon.

"I should say it was, and then, on the top of this pleasant information, he gave me a bit of advice, and that concerns you."

"Why, what did he say about me?" Dolly asked, in wonder.

"Not much about you, in person," Algernon replied. "He simply told me that I mustn't make love to you."

"I wonder if he suspects that we are engaged?" and a blush mantled the cheeks and forehead of the girl.

"No, but he's evidently afraid that something of that sort will happen."

"What did you say?" Dolly asked, anxiously.

"Nothing; what the deuce could I say. It was bad enough to have him coolly inform me that I needn't expect to inherit any of his fortune, without being warned against falling in love with the girl that I was already engaged to. I was so taken aback, I couldn't say any thing at all," Algernon said, dismally.

"But, why does he object?"

"Don't ask me! I can't tell you! Some whim that he has taken into his head."

"I feel that when I tell him how much we love each other, he won't object."

"I wouldn't say any thing at present!" Algernon exclaimed, quickly.

Then a ring at the door-bell sounded through the house.

"I think that's some one for me. I expected Colonel Peyton to call this afternoon. He's a deuced clever fellow, and I'll ask his advice in regard to this matter."

"I was going down to sit with your uncle a little while, but I don't feel like it now," Dolly said, with a mournful face. "If he looked at me, I know I should burst out crying. Come and see me as soon as your visitor goes."

"Yes, I will. I think you had better not let uncle know that I have told you what he said; he might be angry."

"I'll go and shut myself up in my room. Oh dear, I feel so miserable, Alge. I think that it's real mean for your uncle to object to our loving each other!"

Then Dolly retreated quickly, and sought shelter in her room. She cast herself upon the bed with a sigh, and buried her face in the pillow, as though by the act she would blot out the memory of the world and all its cares.

Leaving the girl to her reflections, we will return to Algernon.

The young man stood at the head of the stairs, waiting to see if the servant would ascend with a message to him.

He was not disappointed in his thought, that the visitor was for him, for in a few moments the servant brought him up a card.

On the card was written:

"Colonel Roland Peyton."

"Show him up, James, please—to my room," Algernon said.

The servant descended the stairs, and Algernon entered his apartment, which was on the same floor as that of the young girl's.

In a few minutes the servant conducted the visitor into Algernon's room.

Colonel Roland Peyton was a tall, slender person, with jet-black hair, that curled in crispy curls all over his head, and was worn rather long behind, the curls reaching his coat-collar. A pair of luxuriant side-whiskers, and a full mustache, black as his hair, ornamented his face. Yet, strange to say, with all this mass of dark hair, the colonel's eyes were a light blue in color.

The colonel was dressed a little extravagantly, not to say flashily. A semi-military hat, something of the style worn by the officers of the United States army, was set in a rakish fashion upon one side of his head. In his hand, which was gloved by the brightest of red kids, he carried a switch-like cane, which he twirled about in a devil-may-care manner. From his neck a pair of double eye-glasses hung.

The face of the colonel was a strange mixture of the gentleman and the bully.

On Broadway a detective officer would have picked him out instantly for one of the gentry "who toil not, neither do they spin," but who make a living by the aid of nimble fingers and a pack of cards. "A gentleman who always aids fortune by holding a good hand, or always throwing sixes," as the French say.

As for the colonel's account of himself, it was simple, and he never hesitated to tell it. The son of a wealthy Virginia family, he was reared as a gentleman should be. At the age of twenty he visited Europe. It was just at the time of the Crimean war. He enlisted in the English service—was one of the famous "six hundred" who rode into the jaws of death at Balaklava, and was one of the few who escaped the slaughter. Then, during the war for the Union, he had commanded a regiment under Lee in Virginia, and acted an important part in all the terrible fights which reddened the soil of the "mother of States and statesmen" with human blood.

And now that the white wings of peace once more were spread over the land, the ex-colonel had taken up his residence in New York. As he carelessly said, "The South has gone to the dogs, my ancestral acres won't sell for the taxes on them, and, as I like New York, in future I shall reside at the North. I bear no malice for the past. A noble foe, sir, I respect, by Jove!"

There were some few people in the great metropolis who looked askance at the colonel when he passed them, swinging his light cane, and plainly stigmatized him as "the great American fraud." But, all men have their enemies.

"How is my worthy young friend to-day?" cried the colonel, with a flourish, as he entered the room.

"I'm feeling deuced badly!" replied Algernon. "Sit down, colonel, and take a cigar."

"Ah, thank you!" The gentleman accepted both the cigar and the chair. "Ah! there's nothing like a good cigar for enjoyment," he exclaimed, as he lighted the fragrant "weed." "I love to watch the perfumed smoke curling, like holy incense, up to heaven!" said the colonel, with a wave of the hand. "But, why does my Damon feel ill at ease? Let him confide in his Pythias."

"You know, of course, that I have always expected to become my uncle's heir? I've spoken about it to you."

"You have, many a time and oft, on the Rialto?" said the colonel, theatrically.

"Well, if you had expected all your life to come in some day for about two hundred thousand dollars, and then should suddenly discover that you had about as much chance of it as the man in the moon, wouldn't it rather annoy you?"

"Perhaps, upon some, it would have that effect. When I say some, I mean nearly all the world. But, to a man like myself, you know, who has been used to the ups and downs of fortune, why, it would be a mere trifle. Ah! my dear boy, when, like me, you have rode into the very jaws of death, cannon to the right, cannon to the left, before you the whole Russian army, you will learn to laugh at such a

trifle as the loss of a bit of beggarly money. There was a time when my estates in Virginia brought me in at least thirty thousand dollars a year; and now, I barely receive two thousand. But, I laugh at it. Money! what is it? Filthy lucre—the more one has, the more he is troubled to take care of it. But, by the way, explain; what has caused this sudden change in your prospects?"

"You'll never guess!"

"Oh, I rayther think I can. I think I'm up to almost everything in this world. Bet you a bottle of champagne I guess it the first time!" cried the colonel.

"No, I won't bet, for, hang me, if I think I'd be able to pay, if I lost," replied Algernon: "but I defy you to guess, though."

"Ah, my boy, a man who has served with Lee's army, where we used to satisfy our hunger by buckling our belts tighter around us, is not easily puzzled. The reason for this change is, the old boy's going to be married." The colonel laid back in his chair, and puffed his cigar in triumph.

CHAPTER VI.

OUT OF THE DARK.

"HALLO!" exclaimed Peters, as he surveyed the threatening demonstrations, "are you insane enough to imagine that you can prevent me from leaving this place?"

"You shan't take the gal, nohow!" Rocky replied, defiantly. "You kin git out yourself, jes' as soon as you like. Your room's a good deal better nor your company."

"You no take my gal!" exclaimed the Italian, in wrath, brandishing the glittering knife as he spoke.

"If we leave the girl, you'll let us go then?" Peters asked, quietly.

"Jes' as soon as you like; the sooner the better!" replied the rough; "and you kin jes' thank your lucky stars that you don't git a head put on you for poking your nose into other people's business."

The face of the girl grew paler and paler; she fancied that the men who had come so timely to her aid were now about to desert her, frightened by the threats of the rough. She knew little of the iron wills of the officers.

"I'll give you just one minute to get away from that door, my friend," Peters said, calmly, not a trace of agitation in his voice.

A long breath of relief came from the lips of the child-woman, and the rigid muscles of her face relaxed. Her quick instinct told her that there was yet hope of escape.

Rocky looked into the stolid face of the detective in wonder. He could hardly believe his hearing.

"Wot did you say?" he demanded, roughly.

"Your hearing must be bad; I spoke plain enough," Peters said, a half-smile creeping over his face. "I said that I would give you one minute to get away from that door, you ugly whelp!" And the detective put his hands in his coat-pockets, and surveyed the astonished rough with a scornful smile.

"Oh! git away from the door?" responded Rocky, sarcastically. "Oh, yes, in course! How could a feller refuse sich a perlitte gent as you are?—sich a polished cove—quite a nob! You'll excuse my not takin' off my hat to you, now, won't you?" There was a keen touch of delicate humor in the words of the ruffian—a playful badinage which the rough himself enjoyed if no one else of the company did. "Will you hold your breath till I git away from this door?" he asked, suddenly.

"The minute's about up," Peters said, calmly, without deigning to reply to the polite question so abruptly put.

"Well, wot if it is?" cried Rocky, defiantly. "Wot are you a-goin' to do about it? You don't s'pose you kin talk me away from this door, do you? You ain't sich a flat as all that? Wot are you a-goin' for to do now, say?"

"Put a bullet through your head, you ugly brute!" cried Peters, suddenly drawing a revolver from his pocket and leveling it full at the head of the rough. At the same moment Hank, by a dextrous kick, knocked the knife out of the Italian's hand and sent it whizzing against the wall.

The tables were turned completely.

Rocky glared in astonishment into the mouth of the little shining tube leveled directly at his head, while the old Italian stood with outstretched arms, speechless with rage. The face of the girl brightened up with joy as she beheld the discomfiture of her persecutors.

"Drop that pitcher, or I'll blow the whole top of your ugly head off!" cried Peters sternly, addressing the rough.

Slowly Rocky lowered his hand, in sullen rage.

"Would you go for to murder a cove?" he asked, doggedly.

"It would only be cheating the hangman of a job," Peters replied. "Now stand out of the way."

Slowly Rocky obeyed the command.

"Go ahead, girl," Peters said.

With a bound like a frightened deer, she sprung forward and ascended the stairs. No need to repeat the command a second time.

The Italian tried one last appeal.

"Oh, good sir, you no take my child?" he implored. "I no beat her no more!"

"Played out," said Hank, laconically. The meaning of the terse sentence was perfectly plain, even to the foreign ears of the Italian.

The supplication gave place to threats.

"Diavolo! I kill you both for zis, some day you see!" Jocky cried, in wild rage.

"Save your breath to cool your soup with!" replied Peters, quietly.

The two officers then proceeded to the door—still keeping, however, a wary eye upon the rough and the Italian.

"I'll git square with you for this, see if I don't, cuss me!" cried Rocky, shaking his clenched hand in menace at the men who had beaten him at his own game.

"Let me know when that happens, will you?" Peters rejoined. "I'd like to be round when that little affair takes place. Good-by; I'm sorry I can't stop any longer. I'll come and see you some other time: by-by!"

The door closed behind the two. They ascended the stairs, regardless of the curses that followed them from the baffled villains.

The girl was waiting on the sidewalk at the top of the stairs.

"Come right along with us," Peters said, kindly, as he gained the pavement.

"Yes, sir," the girl replied, a bright smile on her pale features, and a glad light shining in her great dark eyes.

The three proceeded along down the Bowery.

"Now, then, my girl, I must have a little talk with you," Peters said. "What is your name?"

"Lill, sir, though almost everybody calls me the Bowery Girl," she replied.

"What's the reason of that?"

"Because I sells things, sir, on that street, I s'pose."

"Are your father and mother living?"

"Never had any," was the singular reply.

"No father or mother?"

"No, sir; none that I ever heerd tell on."

"Have you always lived with this man?"

"Yes, sir."

"But he's not your father?"

"Oh, no, sir!" the girl replied, quickly. "He's often cursed me for a beggar's brat. If I was his child he wouldn't treat me as bad as he allers has."

"You must have had a pretty hard time of it," the detective said. Even his nature, hardened as it was by constant contact with crime and its votaries, felt a great degree of pity for the Bowery Girl.

"Oh, I have, sir, lots of hard times!" the girl said, earnestly. "I've been running in the streets, a-selling things for Jocky, ever since I've been able to walk. I've allers let him beat me without saying a word, but, somehow, he got my mad up to-night—I've got a temper of my own sometimes—and I didn't care whether I lived or died."

"Then, you are perfectly willing to leave this man and come with me?" Peters asked, feeling quite a strong sentiment of admiration for the girl's spirit.

"Willing to go with you?" exclaimed the girl quickly. "You bet I am!"

A peculiar sort of expression came over the shrewd face of the detective at the "slang" used by the girl. The words grated on his ear, coming from girlish lips. Lill's eyes were quick; she detected the smile in an instant, and guessed that, in some way, she had displeased her protector.

"Wot's the matter, sir?" she asked. "I hope I ain't said nothing that I hadn't ought to?"

"No, no! Of course not!" replied the detective, feeling a little guilty. "What makes you think so?"

"Why, I see'd it in your face," she said. "Oh, my eyes are precious sharp ones. I said something that you didn't like. I wouldn't do that for anything in this world." The earnest tones of the girl told that she spoke the truth. "You're the first one that ever took my part, and I'd do anything for you, I would. Jest you try me and see!"

Peters could not help smiling at the maid's earnest way.

"Well, my girl, I am only acting as agent for somebody else. I am a detective officer."

"Do you know I thought so?" cried the girl, quickly. "You're so kinder cool, and not afeard like."

Again the officer smiled—this time at the compliment.

"Yes, as I said," he continued, "I am employed by a certain party to hunt you up, and take you away from this life that you are leading."

"Somebody a-thinkin' of me?" cried Lill, in wonder.

"Yes. Do you remember the old gentleman that asked you where you lived a few days ago, in the Bowery?"

"An old gray-headed chap?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I remember! He asked me a lot of queer questions."

"He's the party that sent me to hunt you up. I found you, by the aid of the bootblack named Shrimpy." And as Peters happened to glance around, he found that the boy had been following along, discreetly, in the rear. "Oh, I forgot; I promised him twenty-five cents. Hank, give the youngster a twenty-five cent stamp."

Shrimpy received the money, ducked his head in acknowledgment to Peters, grinned at Lill, and immediately departed.

"What does this old gent want of me?" asked the girl in astonishment.

"That I don't know," Peters replied. "All I know is that he employed me to find you. Perhaps he knows something about your parents; or, it may be, that he has taken a fancy to you, and has resolved to provide for you in the future."

"Wot! take care of me?" asked Lill, quickly. And Peters noticed, to his astonishment, that there was an earnest look upon the girl's face, and that she did not seem to be overpleased at the idea.

"Yes, I suppose that is his intention. Mind, I am only guessing what he intends to do, and why he wants to find you, because he did not tell me what his intentions were."

For a few steps the girl walked on in silence. Her eyes were cast upon the ground, and she seemed deep in thought. Peters watched her intently. The detective flattered himself that he was a pretty good hand at reading faces, but this Girl of the Streets puzzled him.

CHAPTER VII.

A STRANGE GIRL.

"WHEN am I to see this gentleman?" the girl asked, suddenly.

"To-morrow afternoon," the detective replied.

"Where?"

"At his house. I am to take you there."

"I don't want to go!" Lill exclaimed, abruptly.

"Eh?" cried Peters, in utter astonishment.

"I say that I don't want to go to see this old gent!" said the girl, petulantly, a pout upon her full lips.

"Don't want to go?" The shrewd detective was utterly astounded.

"No; I never saw him but once, and I don't care if I never see him again," Lill replied, a look of vexation upon her face.

"But, he may be able to tell you something about your parents," Peters urged.

"What do I care for 'em?" the girl exclaimed, quickly. "They never did nothing for me. I don't care whether I ever see 'em or not. They must have had cruel hearts to leave me in the power of Jocky all these long years. A rough bringing up I've had. The Bowery has been my father and mother; leastways it allers protected me. Many's the night I've slept on the cold stones, afeard to go home, 'cos Jocky 'd beat me. I've curled myself up like a dog in a dark corner and slept and dreamed of a home such as some girls have—a home all nice and warm; plenty of loving faces 'round me and kind words, instead of blows and curses."

"And yet now, when that home is offered you, you say that you don't want to go," said Peters, whose naturally kind heart felt deeply for the friendless girl.

"I don't know anything about him—the gent. I mean," the girl replied. "Why should he trouble himself 'bout me? I don't believe that I've got any father or mother anywhere in this world. I never see'd anybody trouble themselves 'bout anybody else yet, unless they thought they could make something by it."

The detective fully realized how dark the life of the girl had been by the one little sentence.

The cold, hard cry of the world was in her mouth. Each for himself, none for his brother.

"Well, but won't you go and see the gentleman to-morrow?" the detective asked.

"I'd rather not!" the girl exclaimed, quickly.

"But he has given me twenty dollars to buy you new clothes. He wants to see you all dressed up like a lady."

A wishful look came over the girl's face, and her eyes brightened up for a moment at the words of the detective. It was only for a moment though; and then again the dull, vacant expression was on her features.

"I ain't a lady," she said, slowly. "Fine feathers don't allers make fine birds."

"But this old gentleman will make a lady of you," the officer urged. "Dressed up nicely, few girls on this street will look any better than you. Why, Lillian—I suppose you name is Lillian, or maybe, Lily?"

"No, Lillian."

"Well, as I was going to say: when you're dressed up, you'll look very pretty."

"Do you think I'm pretty?" the girl asked, suddenly.

The abruptness of the question as well as its nature astonished Peters.

"Yes, I think that you are very pretty," he said, slowly. "When you are dressed up you will be beautiful."

A smile passed rapidly over the girl's face, and, as she looked into the face of the detective, he saw a strange, peculiar light shining in the full black orbs of the child. Never before had he seen such a light in the eyes of any one of womankind.

The smile and the look were the girl's answer to the speech of the detective.

Finding that she did not speak, Peters continued:

"This old gentleman is wealthy—more money than he knows what to do with. He either knows something about your parents, or else he has taken a fancy to you. At any rate, I am sure from what he said to me, that he intends to look after you for the future."

Again the girl did not reply, but walked silently on for a few moments evidently in deep thought.

"If my father is alive, and he should find me, would he have the right to make me do as he said?" she asked, abruptly.

"Undoubtedly," replied Peters, somewhat astonished at the question.

"Do you think that this old gentleman is my father?" she asked, quickly.

"No, I do not." The detective began to wonder why the girl was asking all these odd questions.

"Then he has no right to make me do as he pleases?"

"Of course not, unless you give the right by allowing him to adopt you as his daughter."

"Not much, you bet!" cried Lill, suddenly, and with great determination in her earnest features.

Again the words grated on the ear of the detective. Yet he had heard many a woman use the slang of the streets before.

The quick eyes of the girl detected the look of annoyance upon the officer's face.

"There it is again!" she cried, in an injured tone. "What have I done? I know that I either said or done something wrong, 'cos you wouldn't look that way if I hadn't made you feel bad. What is it?"

"Well, nothing particular," replied Peters, slowly; and in his own mind he instantly decided that the Bowery Girl was one of the strangest characters that he had ever met with in all his life.

"Yes, there is!" said the girl, aggrieved. "It's real mean that you won't tell a feller."

And Peters detected a tear glistening in the dark eye of the girl—tears in the eyes that had only flashed lightning at the Italian's threat.

"Well, if you must know: why do you use those rough words?"

"What words?"

"Why, that slang; 'you bet,' and 'not much?'"

The girl looked at the speaker in wonder.

"Everybody says 'em," she replied.

"But it isn't right for a girl—a lady, to use such words; it may be all right for men and boys."

"Isn't it nice?" the girl asked, wonder in her great eyes.

"No."

"I'll never say 'em no more!" Lill exclaimed, with great determination. "If I say anything more that ain't right, jest you stop me and tell me of it, and I won't do it."

"Well, that's a bargain. But, to come back

to what we were talking about—the old gentleman."

"I won't go with him!" said Lill, decidedly.

"But, what will you do?"

"I don't know. Do you think Jocky can make the police compel me to go back to him if I don't want to?"

"No; I'll take care of that."

"And the old gentleman can't make me go with him?"

"Not unless you want to."

"That's all right!" Lill exclaimed, with an air of great satisfaction. "Then, I'll stay with you!"

"Stay with me!" cried the detective, in utter astonishment.

"Yes—I haven't got anybody else; and I'll stay with you, 'cos I like you—you've been good to me."

In the face of the girl Peters read perfect faith and trust.

"But, what will you do with me?" Peters asked, in bewilderment.

"Any thing you want me to. I can wash dishes, and sweep, and clean house. I used to allers clean the saloon for Jocky. You can take me home to your wife, and I'll tell her how good you've been to me, and how I want to pay you for it; and she can teach me jest what she wants me to do."

Peters listened attentively, while the girl sketched out the new career that opened so brilliantly before her. He watched the eager face, the beaming eyes, and the full, red lips, rich in their dewy freshness.

"But, I haven't got any wife!" Peters exclaimed.

"Oh!" Lill was disappointed. She thought for a moment. "Don't you know any nice lady that you could get for a wife, so she could teach me?" she asked, with a glowing face, as the bright thought came to her.

Peters was obliged, reluctantly, to confess that he didn't.

Again the girl was silent. The odd, thoughtful look, that made her seem old beyond her years, came back over her face.

"Oh, I know!" she cried, suddenly, her face brightening up again; "you can give me some money to buy some things, and I can go and sell them on the Bowery, and bring the money to you, as I used to to Jocky."

"But, would you rather do that than go and live with this old gentleman, and have nice clothes, and plenty to eat, and every thing comfortable?" Peters asked, in some little astonishment.

"Yes," the girl answered, promptly. She did not hesitate an instant in her reply.

"But, I can't understand why you should turn away from a life of comfort to one of toil."

"I can't tell," the girl said, simply.

Peters did not stop to consider that, perhaps, the reason she could not tell was that she did not wish to—he accepted her words in the other sense—lack of knowledge.

"I'm sorry—I thought that the gentleman would be very good to you," he said, slowly.

"Do you want me to go to him?" Lill asked, quickly.

"Yes."

"Well, I'll go!" she said with determination.

The sudden change again astonished the detective. He began to think that the child had strange whims.

By this time the party of three had arrived at the office of the firm of Peters & Henry, on Broadway, just above Broome street.

The front room was the office, the back one a snug bedchamber.

"There, Lill, you stay here to-night; we'll go to a hotel, and come for you in the morning. You can lock yourself in. Good-night."

The Bowery Girl had sweet dreams that night.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RECOGNITION.

ALGERNON shook his head, dubiously, at the confident words of the gallant colonel.

"My uncle going to be married? Oh, no—he has no idea of that sort," the young man said. The colonel stroked his mustache, thoughtfully.

"Not to be married, eh? Well, I confess, then, that my wits are at fault. But you say that you will not inherit your uncle's property?"

"Exactly."

"Has another relative appeared—one nearer than yourself?"

"Yes; now you have guessed it."

"But, I have often heard you say—that is, if my memory serves me right—that you were the only relative that your uncle has."

"So I've always thought, until I was informed by the old gentleman, an hour or so ago, that I might expect to see his daughter very soon."

"His daughter!" exclaimed the colonel, evidently in great amazement.

"Yes," replied Algernon, somewhat astonished at the colonel's manner.

A strange look was on the face of the Southerner—a look which puzzled the young man. He could not understand what possible interest, except that dictated by friendship, the colonel could have in his words.

"You look surprised, colonel," Algernon said.

"Oh, no—not particularly; only, as I have often heard you say that you were the only relative of your uncle, the sudden appearance of a daughter astonishes me a little," the colonel replied.

"It astonishes me a great deal. Why, you could have knocked me down with a feather."

"Then, this daughter is to inherit all your uncle's property?"

"Yes."

The colonel caressed his long mustache in an absent manner. The lines upon his face told that he was deep in thought.

"It's an awful look-out for a fellow, isn't it?" asked the young man, mournfully.

"Yes; it is not pleasant to lose even the prospect of a fortune; but, never say die—never give up the race till the winner's past the post!" cried the colonel, cheerfully.

"What do you advise me to do?"

"Well, this daughter is, probably, quite a young lady. Why not try to captivate her? Marry her, and thus get back the fortune that her coming has taken from you."

Algernon shook his head.

"Won't do, eh?" the colonel questioned.

"No. In the first place, uncle might object to the match; in the second place, the girl might not be pleased with me; and, in the third place, I am already engaged to be married."

"The deuce you are!" exclaimed the colonel, in amazement. "Who is the lady?"

"Miss Blake, my uncle's housekeeper."

"What! some scheming siren, older than yourself, who has entrapped you into an engagement?"

"No—nothing of the sort!" replied Algernon, coloring up as he spoke. "The lady is younger than myself—a mere girl. Her mother was my uncle's housekeeper, and when she died, Dorothy—that's her name—took her mother's place."

"Is she pretty?"

"An angel!"

"Ah, yes," said the colonel, dryly; "the girls that young men fall in love with are always angels. But, do you really intend to marry this girl?"

"Yes."

"Is she worth anything?"

"No; utterly dependent upon my uncle's bounty."

"Well, he may be willing to settle something handsome on her. In that case, your union with this girl wouldn't be such a bad idea, after all."

"On the contrary, my uncle has forbid me to think of Miss Blake. It was only at our last interview he warned me that there must be no love nonsense between us," Algernon said, in a dismal tone.

"Ill luck at all points of the compass!"

"Yes. The future doesn't look very bright for me."

"Don't despair—the darkest hour is always before the dawn. An old saying, but an extremely true one!" exclaimed the colonel, consolingly.

"Have you any advice to offer?" asked Algernon, feeling a little encouraged by the cheering manner of his friend.

"I can give you some information," the colonel replied, meaningly.

"Information about what?" asked the young man, in wonder.

"About your uncle's daughter."

"Well, what can you possibly know about it?" exclaimed Algernon, astonished.

"More than you think," the colonel replied, with a knowing smile. "I knew your uncle years ago."

"You did?"

"Yes," replied the Southerner, quietly enjoying the young man's astonishment.

"But I never heard you say anything about it."

"Very likely," the colonel said, carelessly. "I never thought it necessary to mention it; but it is the truth. Your uncle and I were quite intimate years ago. And now for the information.

In the first place, I am almost certain that your uncle was never married."

"But this daughter?" exclaimed the young man in astonishment.

"A mystery which I will solve before long."

"But still, if he makes her his heir, it doesn't matter whether she is his daughter or not. His wealth will go to her."

"Very true. At present it is of course impossible to decide upon any plan of action. The daughter must come. We must see her—I say 'we,' for I assure you that, for pure friendship's sake, I feel deeply interested in this affair," the colonel said, blandly. "Well, as I said, we must see the daughter—see what she is like, and then decide what must be done."

"Colonel, to be frank with you, I must have some of my uncle's wealth!" Algernon exclaimed, in a strangely emphatic tone for one of his weak nature. "If the girl is really his daughter, then, of course, she has a better claim to it than I; but if she is a stranger not connected by the ties of blood, why, then, she robs me of my rightful inheritance."

"Exactly, my dear boy!" exclaimed the colonel, decidedly. "In my opinion you are fully justified in using any and all means to prevent the consummation of this foul wrong; and I feel that, bound as I am by the ties of friendship, I am justified in aiding you to the extent of my power," and he leaned back in his chair, and looked dignified.

"Colonel, you shall have a fair share of the property if you succeed in getting it for me!" Algernon said.

"Don't speak of the filthy lucre!" the Southerner exclaimed, loftily. "We settle as to terms hereafter. The first thing is to see what the daughter is like."

"When she arrives, I'll arrange it so that you shall see her," Algernon said.

"Yes," and the colonel rose to his feet. "Might I suggest a promenade down Broadway?"

"Not at present," Algernon replied, in a slight confusion that did not escape the vigilant eyes of the colonel.

"Another engagement, eh?"

"I—I was talking with Miss Blake when you came, and I promised her that I would return to her as soon as you were gone."

"Dreadful spoony, my dear boy, eh? Well, we all have a touch of it sooner or later in our lives. It's deuced awkward for you just now, I'm afraid; but time will tell."

Algernon accompanied the colonel down to the door. As they approached it, the door-bell rung. The young man opened the door. Peters, the detective, and Lill, the Bowery Girl, now dressed neatly in a plain dark suit, were standing on the step.

"Mr. Ollkoff in?" the detective asked.

"Yes, sir," Algernon replied, darting a glance at the colonel, as if to call his attention to the girl. "John"—Algernon addressed the servant who was just approaching—"show this gentleman and lady into the parlor, and call Mr. Ollkoff."

The servant obeyed the order.

Hardly had the three entered the parlor, when the young man turned eagerly to the colonel.

"Did you see her?" he asked, but then paused in astonishment as he caught sight of the face of his friend. It was as white as a sheet, and great drops of perspiration stood like waxen beads upon his forehead. The usually cool and smiling colonel was strangely excited.

"Yes, yes; I saw her," the colonel murmured.

"Why, what is the matter, colonel? You are as white as a sheet."

"Am I?" The Southerner made a feeble attempt at a smile.

"Yes; are you ill?"

"Oh, no; a sudden faintness, that's all." The colonel took his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the drops of perspiration from his forehead.

"I shouldn't be surprised if that girl was the expected daughter of my uncle," Algernon said, in a tone of conviction.

"Perhaps so," the other replied, absently.

"She's pretty; did you notice what splendid dark eyes she has?"

"Eyes?—oh, yes!" The colonel was answering like a man in a dream.

"What on earth is the matter with you, colonel?" exclaimed the young man, in astonishment.

"Oh, nothing," and with a great effort, the Southerner roused himself from his abstraction. "So you think that young lady is the one who is going to take your uncle's fortune away?"

"Yes."

"Well, of course I can't say whether she is

the daughter or not; but, if she is, you give me a note for five thousand dollars, payable when you come into your uncle's property, and I'll agree to remove this girl from your way."

"You wouldn't attempt any violence?"

"My dear boy, I am a gentleman, I trust. I shall use only the strong arm of the law. Is it a bargain?"

"Yes." The compact was made.

CHAPTER IX. LILL'S PROTECTOR.

THE detective and Lill were shown into the parlor by the servant, who then went in quest of Mr. Ollkoff.

Lill looked around her in astonishment. Never in all her life had she seen such handsome furniture, such splendid paintings, such evidences of wealth and luxury.

Peters, with a quiet smile upon his shrewd face, watched the girl as her eyes wandered in wonder around the room.

"Well, Lill, this isn't much like the Bowery, is it?" he asked.

"Not much, you—oh! I forgot!" and the girl put her hand to her mouth in great confusion. "I forgot that I said that I wouldn't say those words any more. It's hard work to remember, but I will, though."

Peters laughed at the frank confession.

"But what do you think of this place?"

"Oh! it's beautiful!" the girl replied, an earnest expression upon her face. "I used to dream of just such a place as this, often, when I've gone to sleep in a doorway. But I never thought that there was any such nice places in New York; it seems like fairy-land."

"This is dead earnest?"

"Yes; I've often wondered when I've seen the ladies riding in their carriages, all dressed up in silks and velvet, what kind of places they had to live in, and whether they eat off of gold and silver dishes or not. But it always seemed to me as if they belonged to a different world from the one I lived in."

The entrance of Mr. Ollkoff put an end to the speech of the girl.

Peters rose and introduced Lill.

There was a strange look upon the face of the old merchant as he looked upon the girl—a peculiar light in his eye that few in this world had ever seen there before.

Long and earnestly he looked upon the girl.

"Do you remember me?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," she replied.

"How would you like to come here and live with me—be my daughter?" he said, his voice kind and gentle.

"If he wants me to," Lill replied, looking at the detective.

Ollkoff turned to Peters, in astonishment, at the abrupt sentence.

"You see, sir, this young lady looks upon me as a sort of protector," Peters explained. "I came into the saloon, which has been her home, at quite a critical time last night. Two roughs were about to assault her. My sudden appearance saved her from them and she has taken it into her head to consider herself a sort of a ward of mine. I have explained to her, as well as I could with the slight knowledge I possessed, what your intentions are, and she is perfectly willing to do as I say."

"Yes; if he says I must stop, I will," said Lill, frankly.

"I understand," the merchant said. "I take a very strong interest in you, my girl. You do not seem like a stranger to me, because you are the perfect image of one whom I knew a very long time ago. That one I am sure was your mother."

"What was her name?" asked Lill, suddenly.

"Louise."

"That was my mother's name!" cried the girl. "I know, 'cos Jocky's wife told me so, once."

"Jocky?" questioned Ollkoff.

Peters explained who Jocky was, and gave the merchant a brief account of the life that the girl was leading when he had found her.

"It is as I thought; you are her child. Your mother was a very dear friend of mine, and for her sake, I wish to have the right to take care of you for the future. What do you say? Do you think that you could be happy here with me?"

"Ask him," Lill replied, pointing to the detective. "I'll do any thing he says."

"She has great faith in you," Ollkoff said to Peters, smiling.

"Oh, yes," the detective replied, rather embarrassed by the strong partiality evinced by the girl.

"Then, Mr. Peters, I must apply to you."

"I'm perfectly willing, sir. I've already told

Miss Lill—what's her name, sir—that you will take good care of her."

"Then, if this gentleman is willing, you are?" the merchant asked, addressing Lill.

"Yes, sir," Lill replied, slowly; "but, sir, if I come to live with you, I won't see this gentleman any more, will I?" And there was an anxious look upon the girl's face as she put the question.

"Certainly you will," Ollkoff replied; "he can call to see you whenever you wish him to."

"You see, sir, he's the only friend I've got in the world, and I've only just got him, and I don't want to go back on him so soon," Lill said, earnestly. And as she looked at Peters' face, she saw the smile there that her odd expression had called forth.

"There!" she cried, petulantly, "I've gone and said something that I hadn't ought to. He's a-tryin' to tell me, sir, how to speak properly, but, I'm such a stupid head, I'll never learn."

"Good-by," she murmured; "don't you forget me; I shan't forget you. I'll try very hard to be a good girl, and remember what you told me about saying those ugly words." Then she glanced carefully around her, as if seeking to discover whether they were observed or not. But no one was in sight. Ollkoff had discreetly remained in the parlor. Peters noticed the look and wondered at it.

"You won't be angry?" she asked, slowly, with downcast eyes.

"Angry at what?" exclaimed the detective, in astonishment.

Again the girl glanced around her; then, timidly, she came close to the detective, put her plump arms around his neck and held up her lips.

The detective laughed and kissed the little mouth.

"You poor child!" he said, caressingly patting her cheek.

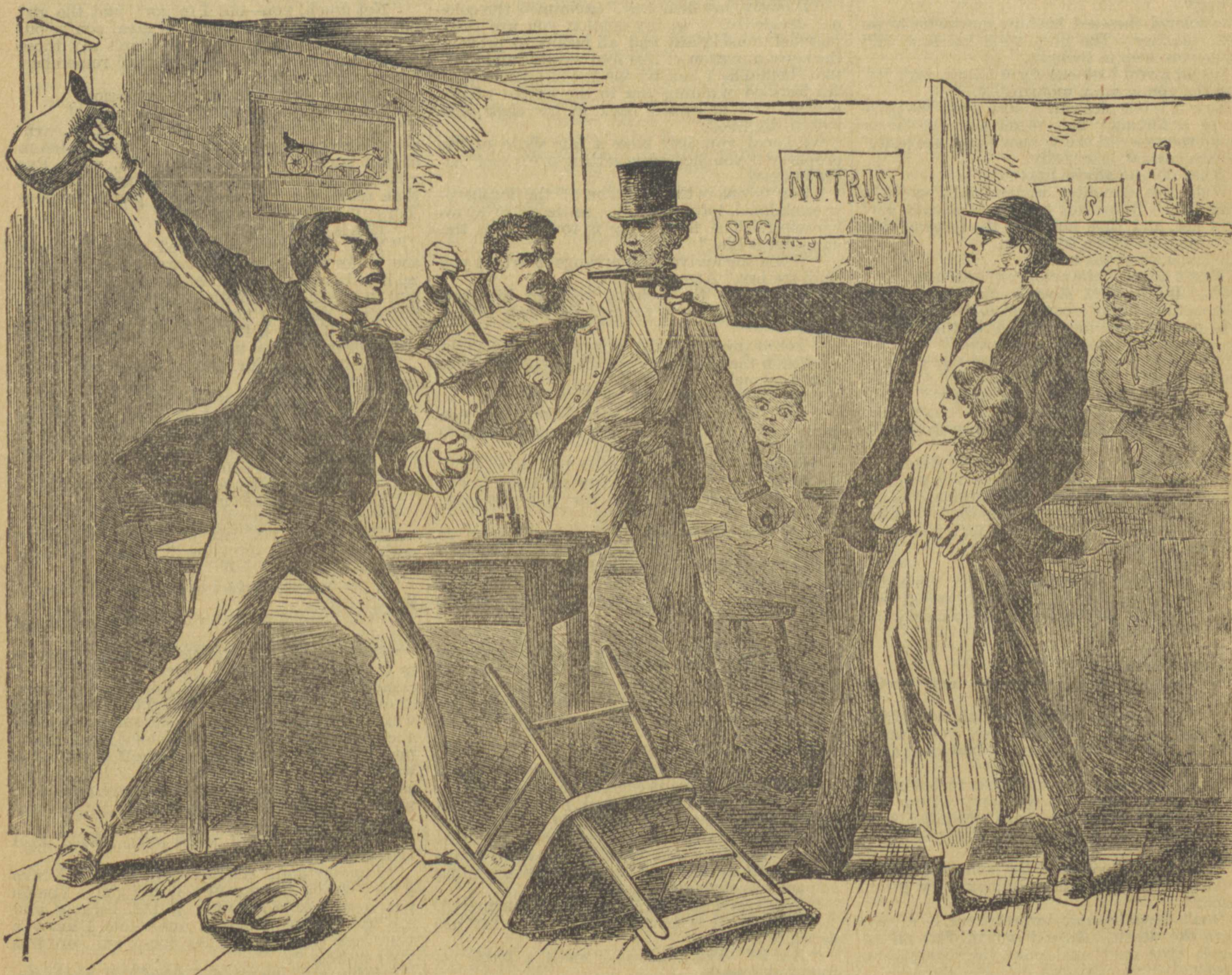
relate how he had rescued her from her persecutors, in the underground saloon, her whole manner changed. The warm blood flushed her cheeks; her eyes sparkled, and her voice was earnest as she told of the deeds of the man, who was a hero in her eyes.

A peculiar look came over the face of the old man. It was not noticed by the girl, whose eyes, fixed on vacancy, saw, in imagination, the face of the one who had befriended her.

"Confound it!" the merchant muttered to himself, as the girl finished her story, "I see I shall have to adopt the detective officer also. The girl will never be satisfied without him, in this world."

The shrewd guess of the old man was correct. The detective was all the world to the girl whom he had rescued from misery.

Leaving the girl to wonder at the splendor that surrounded her, and the old merchant to become more and more interested in the waif



"I'LL GIVE YOU JUST ONE MINUTE TO GET AWAY FROM THAT DOOR, MY FRIEND."

Lill's tone was one of thorough despair. Ollkoff laughed. The innocence of the girl pleased him.

"Oh, you will learn in time, my dear; you mustn't be impatient. And, as this gentleman has commenced to teach you, suppose we arrange to have him come here two or three times a week, and so continue his lessons?"

The eyes of Lill sparkled with delight at the idea.

"Will that please you?" Ollkoff asked, though he plainly perceived the joy of the girl in her face.

"Oh, yes, sir! ever so much!" she exclaimed. So it was arranged that every Wednesday and Saturday the detective was to call and spend the afternoon with Lill.

Peters then took his departure, much to the regret of the girl, whose dark eyes filled with tears as she shook hands with him in the hall.

"You are the only friend that I have ever had, and if you hadn't kissed me before you went away, I should have felt so bad."

"Good-by, again. I'll come Saturday."

And the next instant the door closed behind the officer.

Lill returned to the parlor, and seating herself by the side of the old merchant at his request, she related to him the simple story of her life.

Ollkoff listened attentively. He watched the face of the girl as she spoke. There was a restless, vacant expression upon it which did not escape his attention. Nor was he long in doubt as to the cause of the look. The girl missed her protector. In the presence of Peters she seemed to be a different being.

Skillfully, Ollkoff turned the conversation, and spoke of the officer.

The moment she began to speak of him, and

that he had transplanted from the squalid misery of the streets to the hot-house life of the parlor, we will follow the officer.

Strange thoughts were passing through his mind as he slowly descended the steps that led to the sidewalk.

The rich perfume of Lill's warm kiss was yet lingering on his lips; still—in imagination—he felt the soft pressure of the plump, white arms around his neck. Memories of bygone days came back to him. Again he was a lad, standing in the staid old Vermont village. Again he heard the whirr of the spindles that gave life to the little hamlet. Again he looked in the coquettish blue eyes of the only girl he had ever loved, and heard her calmly say that all was over between them.

A mist came over the clear, cold eyes of the detective, as he thought of his boyish days—thought how he had once loved—how, despair—

ing, he had left the quiet country village, and plunged into the bustle of the metropolis.

"It's strange! What brought Debby Stark into my mind?" he muttered, as he walked along the street, deep in meditation. "Debby was a pretty girl, but she wasn't for me."

Then the detective turned the corner of the street, and, as he did so, he raised his eyes. Across the street he beheld the bootblack, Shrimpy, gesticulating wildly to him.

Peters looked at the boy in astonishment.

"What does he want, I wonder?" he exclaimed.

The boy ran across the street, and approached Peters, with a beaming smile on his dirty face.

"How are you, boss? Got somethin' ticular to tell you," the boy said, mysteriously.

"Spit it out," Peters replied, laconically.

"I don't want 'em for to see me a-talkin' with you, or they'd chaw my ear right off!" cried the boy.

And thus matters stood in the Ollkoff household.

The parlor clock had just chimed ten, when John, the servant, entered the room where the old gentleman sat, deep in the columns of the morning paper, and presenting a card said that the owner, who was waiting at the door, desired to see Mr. Ollkoff on particular business.

"Col. Roland Peyton," muttered the old gentleman, thoughtfully, as he read the name on the card. "I don't know any such man. Are you sure he wants to see me, John?"

"Yes, sir," replied the servant, "and he desired me to say that his business was very urgent."

"Very well, show him in," said the merchant.

"I wonder what the deuce he wants with me?"

Ollkoff murmured, trying to remember if he had ever heard the name of his visitor before.

The servant conducted the visitor into the parlor, then left the room.

style of the stranger's speech he anticipated an attack upon his pocket-book.

"Allow me to introduce myself," continued the colonel, with a graceful wave of his hand; "I am Colonel Roland Peyton, of Virginia, though at present residing in New York."

"I beg your pardon, sir," Ollkoff said, coldly, "but if you have business with me, I must trouble you to proceed to it at once."

"Ex-actly!" replied the colonel, with another flourish. "I see, my dear sir, you still retain the habits of a man of business, although I believe you have long since retired from the busy haunts of trade."

"Will you have the goodness, sir, to explain your business without further prefix?" exclaimed the old man, impatiently.

"Of course!" cried the colonel, in his oily way. "I trust you will not think for a moment that I desire to infringe one little second longer on your valuable time than is absolutely necessary."



A STRANGE LOOK WAS ON THE FACE OF THE SOUTHERNER—A LOOK WHICH PUZZLED THE YOUNG MAN.

CHAPTER X.

BEGINNING THE ATTACK.

LILL had been a resident at the Ollkoff mansion just a week. She had changed greatly during that time; altered both in looks and manners. Few would have recognized in the lady-like girl the street-wanderer. Even the shrewd John Peters wondered at the change. As for the retired merchant, whose bounty had effected the wonderful alteration, he grew to love the girl more and more. There was a keen common sense, an honesty, inherent in the girl's nature that was strangely captivating.

Lill spoke her mind with a frankness truly refreshing. The old merchant chuckled at her odd speeches. Algernon wondered at them, for he never had met a girl like her before; and Dollie Blake told the young man in confidence that she couldn't help liking Lill, although she had tried her best to hate her.

The Virginian colonel—for old Ollkoff's visitor was Algernon's friend, Peyton, in person—advanced with an easy grace and bowed with exaggerated politeness to the old gentleman.

At a single glance, Ollkoff summed up the visitor. He had encountered many a scheming adventurer in his life, and he understood the breed too well to be deceived.

"You wish to see me, sir?" he said, curtly, without rising from his seat or tendering a chair.

"I presume I have the honor of addressing Mr. Obadiah Ollkoff?" the colonel said, not in the least abashed by his cool reception.

"Yes, sir, that is my name," Ollkoff replied, shortly.

"It gives me great pleasure, sir, to meet with a gentleman as distinguished in the annals of trade as yourself."

Ollkoff gave vent to a dry cough. From the

to explain my business. I trust you will excuse me if I take a chair."

Ollkoff nodded. He did not think it worth his while to waste words on the man who he felt convinced was some adventurer on a begging errand.

"Thank you," said the colonel, very politely. Then taking a chair he drew it up near to Ollkoff and sat down in it. Once seated, the colonel cast a suspicious glance around him. Ollkoff opened his eyes in astonishment at the strange manner of the other.

"I suppose, sir, that our interview will be strictly private?" the colonel said, in a tone of question.

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded the merchant, a little annoyed at the words of the other.

"Walls have ears, you know—the old saying," replied the colonel, mysteriously. "The

doors, for instance, lead to a back parlor, I suppose?"

"Well, sir, what if they do?" cried Ollkoff, sharply.

"Oh, nothing," replied the colonel, carelessly; "only if any of your servants or any other members of your household should happen to be in that room," and here the colonel's manner became very mysterious again, "they might be able to overhear our conversation."

"It is not likely, sir, that any one in this house will condescend to play the part of an eavesdropper upon us; but, even if some one by accident should overhear what we have to say, I can not see what difference it would make." Ollkoff's manner was far from being amiable.

"To me it wouldn't make the slightest difference, of course; but to you it would doubtless be very unpleasant," the colonel replied.

Ollkoff stared at his visitor in astonishment. He detected that there was a hidden meaning, fraught with menace, in the words of his visitor.

"Unpleasant to me?" the merchant said, slowly.

"Of course!" the colonel exclaimed, a look of surprise upon his face. "Oh! I forgot! how stupid I am!" and the colonel tapped his forehead with his fingers. "You don't know what I'm going to say to you. Of course not! how could you?" And the adventurer smiled beamingly in the face of the merchant.

"For the last time, sir, may I request that you will have the goodness to explain your business?" cried the merchant, petulantly.

"Of course—certainly!" and with another beaming smile, the colonel adjusted the double eyeglasses upon his nose. "In the first place you will have the kindness to answer me one question?"

"That depends altogether upon what that question is," replied Ollkoff, dryly.

"Ah!" and the colonel nodded his head in a knowing manner; "I see, my dear sir, that you have not forgotten the legal experience which long years of business has instilled into your nature. You do not commit yourself rashly. See how different I am; a soldier, I only know enough about law to teach me to keep away from it all I can."

"Will you explain your business, sir?" exclaimed Ollkoff, beginning to lose his temper.

"Certainly," replied the colonel, blandly. "In the first place, the question: You have a young lady in this house who answers to the name of Lillian?"

Ollkoff started in amazement, and stared in the smiling face of the colonel. The blow was an unexpected one. He felt that it was the commencement of an attack. The keen eye of the colonel noted the confusion of the merchant. With an effort, Ollkoff recovered his composure.

"Well, sir, I don't know that you have any right to ask such a question!" the merchant exclaimed, in a tone of anger.

"Ah! and you decline to answer it?" the colonel said, coolly.

"I think the question an impertinent one, and I question your right, sir, to question me, regarding the inmates of my house!" cried Ollkoff, defiantly.

"Let me see!" said the colonel, thoughtfully; "when you have no case, bully the opponent's lawyer." That's something like the good old legal advice, isn't it? And that's what you are trying to do in this instance, but, my very dear sir, it won't work. I am a man of the world, and one not easily bullied. To use the slang, that sort of thing is 'played out' with me. It is useless for you to attempt to evade or deny the fact. You have in this house a young girl named Lillian."

"Well, what if I have?" demanded Ollkoff, indignantly.

"Do you know the history of this girl?" asked the colonel quietly, and as he spoke, he bent forward and fixed his eyes full on the face of the merchant.

Ollkoff's face flushed for a moment and the muscles of his mouth contracted. Then, with a great effort to appear calm, he spoke.

"I decline, sir, to answer your questions, and if you have no other business with me, the quicker you end this interview the better."

"Oh, I've got a great deal to say yet," replied the colonel, coolly. "You see, I thought it proper before I explained my business, to, in a measure, prepare you for it; the same as in a battle, you know, we fight on the skirmish line before we attack in masses. If you don't know the history of this young girl, I propose to relate it to you."

"You know it?" cried Ollkoff, in wonder.

"Oh, yes," replied the colonel, in his usual cool way; "a man who travels round the

world, and keeps his eyes open, sees many strange things. I understand that you intend to adopt this girl."

"Who told you that?" demanded Ollkoff, gruffly.

"Suppose, now, I should reply as you did, but a moment ago, and say that I decline to answer your question?" asked the adventurer, with a sarcastic smile.

"Enough, sir; you need not reply!" cried Ollkoff. "But, you have been rightly informed, sir; I do intend to adopt the girl."

"Man proposes, fate disposes," said the colonel, with a smile full of meaning.

"What do you mean, sir?" Ollkoff's anger was again rising.

"Just what I said. You propose to adopt this girl known as Lillian; fate disposes that you shall not do anything of the sort."

Ollkoff began to believe that he was talking with a madman.

"I tell you again, sir, that I intend to adopt the girl!" he said, angrily.

"And I tell you that, if a certain person objects, you won't do anything of the sort," replied the colonel.

"And who is that person?" asked Ollkoff, in wonder.

"Her father!" replied the colonel, triumph in his voice.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PROPOSAL.

"HER father!" ejaculated the old man, in utter astonishment.

"Yes—her—father," replied Peyton, coolly and deliberately; it was plain that he was enjoying his triumph.

"He is not living!" cried Ollkoff.

"Oh, yes, he is; you see, my means of information are much better than yours."

"Hark ye, sir, I do not believe that you know anything about the girl at all."

"How incredulous you are!" exclaimed the colonel, in a tone wherein wonder and sarcasm were strangely blended. "I have already told you that I propose to relate to you the history of this girl, and, now, you deliberately tell me that you do not believe that I know anything about it at all. To convince you that you are wrong in your surmise, I will relate to you a short story. Eighteen years ago, in the employ of a certain firm in this city of New York, were two clerks; one named Obadiah Ollkoff, the other Harry Belford."

The merchant started at the name, and looked searchingly into the face of the other, but the colonel bore the scrutiny without flinching.

"Oh, you needn't look at me!" cried Peyton; he had guessed the thought of the other. "You won't see the features of Harry Belford in my face."

He was right, for Ollkoff could not detect the slightest resemblance to the man who had once been his fellow-clerk.

"The two men—to continue my story—were chums, although their habits and dispositions were as unlike as day and night. Belford was a free-hearted, dashing young fellow, nothing of the Puritan about him, while Ollkoff was sober and reserved, 'the parson,' as he was commonly called. You'll excuse my personal allusion; the man who relates history must speak without fear or favor!" exclaimed the colonel, grand-eloquently.

"Go on, sir, and be as brief as possible!" said the merchant coldly.

"Certainly; these two men, fellow clerks, fell in love with the same woman, a black-haired, black-eyed beauty, named Louise Carman."

The speaker paused after he pronounced the name, as if to note the effect of it upon Ollkoff. He was playing with him as the cat plays with the mouse. But, except that the face of the merchant was a shade paler, he betrayed no sign of emotion.

"Of course a man of your keenness would instantly guess, even if you did not know—as you do—the facts in the case, that the lady preferred the gay and dashing Harry Belford to the sober-minded Ollkoff. Belford wooed and won the lady. Two years only he enjoyed his bride; then the storm of misfortune came thick about him. His wife deserted him, carrying with her the baby-girl that Heaven had sent to bless his home. From that day to this he has never seen his wife; but, at last, fate has proved kind to him, and he has found his child."

"I do not understand," said Ollkoff, slowly.

"Because you do not wish to understand. This girl, Lillian, is the daughter of Louise Belford."

"You cannot prove that!"

"Do you want me to try whether I can or not?" asked the colonel, quickly.

Ollkoff did not reply.

"In the first place, the girl is the living image of her mother. That resemblance betrayed the secret to you. You loved the mother; lost her; but now you have obtained possession of her child. I think that it is extremely probable that the same hand that took the mother from you will also take the daughter."

"You are speaking of the man once known as Belford."

"Exactly. I understand what you mean by 'once known.' You are insinuating that he is no longer known by that name."

"To use your own word, 'exactly!' replied Ollkoff, dryly. "A criminal from justice—gambler—forger—rascal of all grades; it is not likely that he dares to bear his own name."

"True; in the wildness of youth, he may have committed some foolish acts, that, for a while, necessitated his speedy departure for a foreign clime; but, that was years ago. Time brings forgetfulness. It is extremely probable that he could walk the streets of New York to-day as Harry Belford without endangering his personal liberty in the least."

"Well?"

"Well!" cried the colonel, in affected amazement. "You speak in a tone of question. Don't you understand? This girl, Lillian, whom you propose to adopt as your daughter, is the child of your former companion, Belford. Belford is still alive; is in New York to-day; he has seen his child; the holy feelings of paternal love swell in his breast, and he has made up his mind to have the girl Lillian."

Full of menace was the tone of the colonel.

"Give the girl up to his tender mercies! Never!" cried Ollkoff, impetuously.

"Then he appeals to the law. What power can tear a child from its parent?"

"His bad character—his vile associates—"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Peyton, quickly; "you are speaking of the past, not of the future. Suppose they put you on the witness stand, what can you tell of Harry Belford to-day? The chances are ten to one that you wouldn't know him if you met him in the street. You can say that, sixteen years ago, he fled from New York, to escape a prosecution for forgery; but, since that time, what do you know of him? Can you say aught, good or bad? No! What his life has been since that time, you cannot even guess. His record may be as black as ink, or as white as snow."

"You have come here, then, I suppose, as an agent of this man, to demand this girl?" said Ollkoff, thoughtfully.

"That is my errand."

"And if I refuse to give her up?"

"Then the father will call upon the courts of law to do him justice."

"Be it so. I will never resign the girl to his hands until I am compelled to do so," replied Ollkoff, firmly.

"Now I think of it, there may be a way in which this matter may be arranged," the colonel said, caressing his glossy side-whiskers, with a thoughtful air.

"Indeed—how?"

"Of course, when Mr. Belford discovered that his daughter was in your care, his ancient foe, he naturally felt angry. He was for taking the girl away from you at once, without warning; but, yielding to my counsel, he consented to listen to reason. Mr. Belford is not rich; you are—"

"I understand!" cried Ollkoff, scornfully. "This father, whose feelings are outraged because the child—for whom he has never provided—is in my hands, is yet willing to sell her to me!"

"Exactly," replied Peyton, coolly; "you have hit the right nail on the head. It's a pleasure to do business with such a thorough business man as you are."

"I begin to perceive that Mr. Harry Belford is as big a scoundrel as ever," Ollkoff said, disdainfully.

"Oh, don't call names. In justice to my principal, I shall have to put them in the bill. The more abuse, the more money it will cost you," and the colonel laughed, quietly.

"In fact, taking advantage of my love for this poor girl, you are going to use her to wring money out of me?"

"That's the idea. As I said before, you are rich—able to pay for your luxuries. We—Mr. Harry Belford and myself—intend that you shall pay for this one," said the colonel, coolly. "We strike oil in you."

"How much?"

"Ah!" and Peyton rubbed his hands together, gleefully; "that's business. Five thousand dollars."

"Five thousand?"

"Yes. For that sum the father will sign the girl over to you. It's cheap. Consider the lacerated feelings of a father's heart—parting with his only child. 'Pon my soul! if I were in Belford's place, I shouldn't let you off under ten thousand."

"Have you calculated the difficulty that your principal may have in establishing his claim to the girl?" asked Ollkoff.

"Oh, yes; we have calculated everything," replied Peyton, confidently. "You are not dealing with chickens, but with two tough old roosters. We've traveled some—seen the world—know the points—how to play 'em; and, better still, we're not afraid of our game, for we know we hold the winning hand."

"Suppose I refuse to accede to your demand, and you beat me at law, and thus take the girl from me, what will you do with her?"

"Make her support the parent, who is getting old and lazy, and doesn't feel like supporting himself any longer. She's young and pretty, tough and strong. If she takes after her mother, she's got a good ear for music. Why, they give large salaries in the music-halls for pretty girls who can sing."

"And her brute of a father would doom her to such a life?" cried Ollkoff, in indignation.

"Any thing to make money out of her," replied the colonel, coarsely. "If you don't want her to go to ruin, you had better give our price. Plank down five thousand dollars, and we'll never trouble you again."

"How long will you give me to think over this matter?" asked the old man, thoughtfully.

"Just four-and-twenty hours," replied Peyton. "Of course, you will not attempt any underhand work between now and then?"

"No, sir!" said Ollkoff, quickly.

"It wouldn't do you much good to attempt it, because you've got keen hounds on the scent, and they'd run you to earth in no time, double as you may."

"Threats are useless, sir; I have given you my word," replied the old man, slowly.

"Now that we have come to an understanding, I will take my departure," said the colonel, rising. "I trust that you will see the wisdom of submitting to our modest demand. 'Tisn't every father that would sell his only daughter for five thousand dollars. It's dirt cheap. At this hour to-morrow, I shall have the honor of calling upon you again. By the way, have the five thousand in bills—no check; great trouble to cash them sometimes, and, once in a while, they conceal a trap. Good-morning." Bowing gracefully, the colonel departed.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DETECTIVE'S COUNSEL.

WITH a smiling face, and a self-satisfied look in his crafty eyes, the adventurer descended into the street. He twirled the little cane around in his fingers as usual, and marched down the street with head erect.

He scented triumph in the air.

"Ha! I shall get that five thousand!" he muttered. "It is a deuced sight better to finger the cash now than to wait and depend upon young Algernon. The chances are ten to one against his ever getting the old man's estate. No, no, I have managed it far better. Mr. Harry Belford ought to be satisfied with the very able manner in which I have carried the affair through. I came near losing my temper once, though; and if that had happened, all the fat would have been in the fire. This cursed hot temper of mine has worked me evil enough already. It's about time that I got it under. Let me get this money, and hard fortune and I will part company for a while. This is the most pleasant prospect that I've had presented to my view for many a long day."

The colonel swaggered along with a far brighter smile on his wan features than they usually showed.

To judge from his face, Colonel Roland Peyton had seen some pretty hard times in his life.

Ollkoff, after the departure of his visitor, sat for some time in deep thought. The blow that had fallen upon him had been totally unexpected. By accident he had met Lill in the street, saw the wonderful resemblance that she bore to the only woman he had ever loved, and guessed that she was the child of that woman. Acting on the thought, he had dispatched the detective in quest of the girl. And now, as he thought over the past, the shrewd detective, Peters, came into his mind.

"The very man!" he cried, emphatically

"He can advise me in this matter if any one can. I'll send for him at once."

The old gentleman wrote a note to the detective, and dispatched the servant with it.

"There; when he comes, I will lay the whole matter before him. He is a shrewd fellow; used, too, to dealing with these rascals; his advice will be valuable."

Ollkoff waited with impatience until Peters arrived.

The detective was shown into the parlor—the servant had luckily found Peters at home—and the old merchant proceeded at once to relate the whole particulars of his interview with the gentleman who had called himself Colonel Roland Peyton.

Peters listened attentively.

"What do you think of it?" Ollkoff asked, anxiously, after he had finished.

"An ugly case," replied the detective, with a shake of the head.

"Do you really think so?" Ollkoff questioned, in alarm.

"Yes, if this fellow has spoken the truth."

"Oh, there's no doubt but what the girl is the child of the man that he represents—Harry Belford."

"Ah, but there's the point!" exclaimed the detective; "does he represent this man? How can you tell that this isn't a clever device to swindle you out of five thousand dollars? This colonel—about as much of a colonel as I am—is evidently one of these clever 'confidence men'—a genteel swindler. You see, he has presented no proof that the man he pretends to represent is alive."

"That's very true," said Ollkoff, thoughtfully.

"If the father is alive, why should he employ this man to act as a go-between? He'll have to pay him for his services, of course."

"That is very reasonable; I wonder that I did not think of that myself."

"Well, you're not used to dealing with these slippery gentlemen. Bless you! they are worse than an eel; you must sand your hand before you can hold them."

"What is your idea of this affair?"

"Simply this: by some means this fellow has become possessed of the girl's history. He comes to you, representing himself as acting for the girl's father; his game is to frighten you into buying him off, by the threat of taking the girl away."

"And suppose I defied his power?"

"It is extremely probable that you would never see or hear of him again. That's one theory."

"Oh, there's another side to the question, then?"

"Of course; and that is, that this man has spoken nothing but the truth—that he is the agent of the father; that the father is living, and will attempt to take the girl away from you, if you refuse to accede to his demand. You see, sir, to make a successful defense we must prepare for him on both points: first, that he is acting without authority; second, that he is possessed of full power to act in the premises."

"Yes, I see," Ollkoff felt convinced that he had acted wisely in calling in the aid of the detective. "But even if the father appears, can he take the girl?"

"Yes, sir, I think he can; the law will give her to him. I think I have got all the points in the case. The wife deserted the husband, carrying the girl, then an infant, with her?"

"Yes; she fled to avoid his brutal treatment."

"That doesn't make any difference; besides, it will be a difficult thing to prove after all these years. He did not desert the child; there's the point. After the wife had gone, the husband fled to escape the consequences of a forgery that he had committed."

"That is correct."

"Was this forgery business brought to trial?"

"No; the criminal had fled; the firm made no efforts to pursue him, and so the affair never came into the courts."

"Well, now, Mr. Ollkoff, our case is as follows: if we act on the assumption that this fellow is a fraud from beginning to end, we will simply laugh at him and his threats, and threaten his arrest as a blackmailer. But, if we act on the other belief that he really is the agent of the girl's father, and has this Belford ready to come forward and claim her, we have two modes of defense: first, rake up the old forgery charge, and threaten him with it; second, discover, if possible, if some other serious crime isn't attached to his skirts."

"But that will be very difficult!"

"Oh, yes; but not impossible," replied the

officer, in a confident tone. "From what you have told me of the man, I have an idea that he is not one disposed to live by honesty, if the easy paths of rascality lie open to him. We must gain time; they have given four-and-twenty hours; we will take a few more than that number. At present, we have a decided advantage; the girl is in our hands; possession, you know, is nine points of the law—a good old legal maxim. The first move we take is to place the girl in some secure retreat."

"But I gave the fellow my word that I wouldn't use any underhand means between now and to-morrow."

The detective made a comic gesture of despair.

"My dear Mr. Ollkoff, if this fellow had agreed to run you a race for five thousand dollars and then requested you to tie up one leg before you started, wouldn't you have objected to it?"

"Why, yes, of course."

"That is precisely what you have done by giving him such a promise. Underhand means!" exclaimed Peters, with an accent of contempt in his voice: "why this fellow would use any means to beat you out of your money. He don't want the girl; he wants your five thousand dollars. Don't you be alarmed; even if the father be living, he won't bring the affair into a court of justice, except as the last resource. He may threaten, but he won't do it until he discovers that you are firm in your determination not to pay the money. But since you have given your word, all right; let Lill stay here until to-morrow; that will clear your conscience. I will be present at the interview between yourself and this Colonel Peyton. I'll hide in a closet or in the back parlor, where I can hear every thing without his suspecting the presence of a witness. Perhaps I know the bird; these fellows, you know, have as many names as they have fingers and toes—a new one for every day in the week. If he should happen to be an old acquaintance, I may be able to spring a mine upon him that will upset his calculations."

"My dear Mr. Peters, I leave everything in your hands!" the old merchant exclaimed.

"I'll do the best I can to beat 'em, sir, and I haven't much doubt that we'll come out ahead. But touching this forgery business, do you suppose the forged paper is still in existence?"

"That is doubtful; the affair happened a long time ago; still, it is just possible that it may exist. The junior member of the firm is still living, Mr. William N. Grainger. He resides at Stamford. He has quite a place there; any one in the village can tell you where it is."

"I'll take a run out there at once," Peters said, decidedly. "If we can only hold that forgery over his head the game's ours; that is if the father is living; if he isn't, I shall have very little trouble with this colonel."

With this assurance, Peters departed, leaving the old gentleman quite easy in his mind.

"Sharp as a steel-trap!" exclaimed Ollkoff, in admiration. He referred to the detective.

The merchant did not say a word to Lillian regarding the matter that so nearly concerned her welfare. He thought that the knowledge of the conflict that was about to take place as to her guardianship, had better be kept from her.

Affairs passed on as usual that day in the Ollkoff mansion. No one could have guessed from the manner of the old man that anything unusual had taken place.

The household retired to rest early, as was their usual custom. But when, in the morning, the family gathered around the breakfast-table, one was missing. That one was Lillian!

The old gentleman wondered at her delay, and sent a servant to call her, thinking that she had overslept herself.

The servant returned with the astonishing news that the young girl was not in her room, and that her bed had not been slept in the previous night.

An instant examination confirmed the truth of her words.

Ollkoff understood what had occurred at once; Lillian had been abducted. The merchant guessed the hand that had dealt so terrible a blow.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DETECTIVE'S RUSE.

CONSTERNATION reigned supreme in the Ollkoff mansion. The mysterious disappearance of Lillian astonished all the household.

The old gentleman cross-examined the servants but gained no information.

Lillian had retired to rest about ten o'clock as usual. She had bidden her maid good-night,

and closed the door of her chamber behind her. The girl was the last one who had seen Lillian. But her evidence afforded no clew.

In utter astonishment, Ollkoff sent at once for the detective officer, Peters. He had grown to have great faith in the keen wits of that gentleman.

Luckily for the merchant, Peters happened to be in his office and so was able to come at once. Just one hour after the girl's absence had been discovered, the detective officer stood within her room.

Quietly, and with apparent unconcern, the detective questioned the girl who had bidden Lillian good-night.

The maid told a plain, straight-forward story. She was coming up-stairs just as Lillian entered her room. Lillian paused a moment, looked to see who it was, said, "Is that you, Mary?" the girl answered, "Yes," then Lillian said "Good-night," entered her room and closed the door behind her.

"How was Miss Lillian dressed?" asked Peters.

"In her house-dress, sir, a merino, wine-color."

"Where does Miss Lillian keep the things she wears in the street, shawls, cloaks and hats?"

"In that closet, sir," replied the girl, pointing to it.

"You know all the articles of that sort that Miss Lillian had?"

"Yes, sir."

"Look and see if anything is missing."

The girl obeyed the order.

It may be as well to mention that the only witness to the conversation between the detective and the girl, was the old merchant.

"Oh!" cried the girl, suddenly.

"Something gone?" asked Peters, quietly.

"Yes, sir, a plaid shawl."

"What colors?"

"Black and white."

"Ah! now we're getting at it," observed the detective, carelessly. "Mary—I believe your name is Mary, isn't it, my dear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you happen to notice what sort of shoes Miss Lillian had on last night?"

"Yes, sir; her house slippers." In her own mind the girl set the detective down as being a perfect gentleman.

"Ah! now we are getting at it," exclaimed Peters, in a sort of self-satisfied tone. "Mary, where does Miss Lillian keep her shoes?"

"In this closet, sir."

"See if they are all there."

"Yes, sir," replied the girl, promptly. The shoes were right before her eyes; no need of an examination.

"They are all there? none missing?" Peters asked.

"No, sir."

"Ah! now we've got it!" and Peters smiled beamingly.

"You have discovered a clew?" asked Ollkoff, anxiously.

"Yes, sir; the explanation is a reasonable one. Miss Lillian, after bidding this young lady good-night, and closing the door, suddenly took the idea into her head that she wanted something; a paper of candy or something of that sort, most probably; so she just slipped the plaid shawl over her head and ran out to get it. On the way to the store, or back, something happened to her; a fainting-fit, perhaps. I've no doubt that I'll find out all about it at the station-house."

Ollkoff was about to expostulate against this reasoning, but catching Peter's eye, a knowing wink warned him to be silent.

"Oh, yes, of course—very probably," he said.

"By the way, Mr. Ollkoff, how about that rare book that you wanted to show me the other day?" Peters said, carelessly.

Ollkoff understood the detective's meaning. He wished to speak with him in private.

"Certainly—come into the library."

Ollkoff led the way; Peters followed, while Mary descended into the lower region to tell the servants of the detective's explanation of Miss Lillian's mysterious disappearance; and also to sing the praises of that worthy and astute officer.

"A perfect gentleman!" Such was the house-maid's opinion.

In the library Peters closed the door carefully behind him. The careless expression upon the features of the detective passed away and a thoughtful one took its place.

"Well, well?" questioned Ollkoff, nervously; "you don't really believe in this explanation that you have given?"

"Of course not," Peters replied; "but it is

necessary that the girl should believe, and say, that I am satisfied. If certain parties think that I am on a false scent, they won't be so careful to cover up their tracks, as otherwise they might be.

"But, Mr. Peters, pray relieve my suspense!" exclaimed the old gentleman, anxiously; "what do you think has become of the girl?"

"She has been carried off," replied the detective, quietly. His composed manner forming a strange contrast to the nervous excitement of the old gentleman.

"Carried off!" cried Ollkoff, in horror.

"That is precisely what has occurred. Do you remember that I remarked that possession was nine points of the law? that brilliant idea has also occurred to somebody else. They have put it in practice, too, by carrying off the girl."

"Ah! then you think that this colonel, who pretends to represent the girl's father, is at the bottom of this outrage."

"That is my thought exactly; and now, I am more and more impressed with the belief that I had first; that is, that the father does not exist; that this colonel is both agent and principal. After his interview with you he came to the conclusion that you might defy him to do his worst, and knowing that he could not produce the father and thus take the girl away from you, by due process of law, he kidnaps her."

"Can it be possible?" exclaimed Ollkoff, in anguish.

"My dear sir, there are stranger crimes committed in this world than you read of in the columns of the newspaper. The fellow is playing a game of bluff with you; he feared that you would prove as good a hand at that as himself. He gets you to make a promise to do nothing underhand; that is, not to hide the girl away, and in the mean time he coolly steals her himself. Yesterday you had the advantage; to-day he possesses it. When he comes to see you he will offer to sell the girl to you for five thousand dollars. By Jove! Mr. Ollkoff, this colonel is a far more clever rogue than I thought."

"What is to be done?"

"Temporize—promise everything and give nothing," replied Peters, coolly. "We must meet this fellow at his own game and use his weapons."

"But how in heaven's name could he manage to carry off the girl? Surely she would not have gone with him of her own free will."

"No," replied Peters, quickly; "the last time I was here, she promised me that she would not leave this house. She gave me her word, and she meant to keep it, sir; no fear of that. She never left this house of her own free will."

"I believe it!" cried Ollkoff, emphatically. "Don't spare money to aid you in discovering her, Mr. Peters; call on me for all you want. I love the girl as if she were my own child."

"I'll find her, sir; don't fear as to that!" said the detective, with determination. "And for a clew, I didn't discover much up-stairs. The shawl that is missing was probably used by the abductors to wrap around her head, and so conceal her face."

"But I should have thought that she would have given an alarm."

"Bless you! they didn't give her the chance!" exclaimed the detective. "The fellows were probably concealed in her room; the moment she entered it, they sprung upon her and applied a drug, which stupefied her. Men are drugged and robbed every day in New York. The doctors say it can't be done, but, nevertheless it is done, as the police records show. The parties then wrapped the shawl around her head, and carried her out of the house, probably had a carriage in waiting, put her in it, and drove off."

"But I can't understand how they could dare to attempt so bold an outrage!" said the merchant, in amazement. "The hour was early; the chance of encountering some one of my household great. How could they tell that we had gone to bed?"

"Simply enough; whoever carried out this abduction had an accomplice *inside* the house."

"What!" and Ollkoff started in amazement.

"Some one inside introduced the ruffians. They drugged the girl; then the inside fellow conducted them from the house, of course first assuring himself that everybody had gone to bed. I had this suspicion when I was questioning the girl; that's the reason I led her off on a false scent. Of course she will repeat my words down-stairs among the servants. The one who has acted in collusion with the abductors will believe that his part in the affair is not suspected. He will be off his guard, and the first thing he knows, I'll catch him tripping."

"Mr. Peters, Heaven will surely aid you, for

you are fighting the battle of the weak against the strong, of the helpless girl against her bold, bad enemies," said the old man, impressively.

"I trust so, sir," replied Peters; "and now I must see your servants; and without exciting their suspicions as to the object I have in view."

"How can it be effected?"

"I've thought of a way," replied the detective, his mind ever fertile in ideas. "Have you a burglar-alarm applied to your house?"

"No, sir."

"You want one, of course, and you ask my advice in regard to the proper places to attach the aforesaid. In order to give you an opinion, I must examine the basement-floor. You, of course, go with me, and during the examination I shall be enabled to see all the servants."

"A capital idea!" exclaimed the merchant.

"It will work," replied Peters, complacently. "We must take occasion to speak about the alarm, so that the servants will understand what we are after."

"You think you can detect the one who is in league with the ruffians?"

"Well, I can try," replied Peters, non-committal in his speech. "A man can't do more, you know."

CHAPTER XIV.

AT HIS WIT'S END.

OLLKOFF and Peters proceeded to the lower part of the house. As they descended the stairs that led to the kitchen-floor, Peters commenced to explain the theory of the burglar-alarm in quite a loud voice.

Ollkoff led the way to the kitchen, which was in the back of the house.

"You'll excuse our intrusion, Sarah," the merchant said to the presiding genius of the culinary department.

"Oh, yes, sir," replied the cook, who was a good-looking woman of forty.

"Do you think that it had better be applied to the windows here?" asked Ollkoff.

"Yes, sir, decidedly," replied the detective, who at a glance had taken in all the inmates of the kitchen. There were only three persons besides Ollkoff and the officer in the room—Mary, the chambermaid, Sarah, the cook, and a loutish-looking young man, her son, who attended to the cleaning of the knives, blacking of the boots, and various other little odd jobs about the house.

After a careful inspection of the windows, and a full discussion of the advantages of the "alarm," the detective and the merchant proceeded up-stairs.

Ollkoff could hardly conceal the impatience he felt to learn whether the acute professional had discovered a clew or no.

"Well?" he asked, anxiously, as he closed the parlor-door behind him.

Peters understood the merchant's meaning.

"I've succeeded, sir," he said, with a quiet smile.

"You have!" exclaimed Ollkoff, in astonishment, and a smile of delight came over his face.

"Yes, sir; as I expected, in the kitchen department I hit off the scent. Now, in the first place, your cook's name is Donahar."

"Yes; that's the woman I addressed as Sarah."

"Exactly; and that young man was her son, Michael."

"What! do you think that *he* had anything to do with the affair?" asked the merchant, utterly astounded.

"Yes, sir; I am almost certain that he is the very identical individual who opened the doors of your house to the ruffians who carried Miss Lillian away."

"Why do you think so?"

"Do you know anything about the character of this young man?" asked Peters, abruptly, replying, "Yankee fashion," to one question by asking another.

"Well—no; I—I really don't know anything about his character at all, though I have known him for over ten years. His mother has been in my employ for that time. I have had the boy round the house to run errands and do little odd jobs. He seemed to be a little stupid, but I never thought him dishonest."

"You are right, Mr. Ollkoff; he is stupid, but he's more knave than fool."

"You know him, then?"

"Yes; I met him once, about two years ago," replied the detective in his quiet way. "Nature has given me one very valuable gift for a man in my line of business; I never forget a face, and very seldom the place where I saw it."

"And where did you see this young man?"

"At the Tombs police court. He was sent up

to the Island for six months, for being concerned in a robbery. The sentence was a light one; first, on account of his youth, and it being his first offense; and second, as it was proved on his trial that he was merely a tool in the hands of older and more experienced rascals. That is exactly the part he has played in this affair. When a man once gets mixed up with these fellows, he doesn't often get rid of them, even though he tries to lead an honest life. They have a pull on him from the fact that he has been in trouble; as long as they are in the mire themselves, they don't like to see one of their pals attempt to cheat the hangman."

"But, how is it possible that this colonel could have come in collusion with Michael?"

"Ah, that is difficult to guess," Peters replied, with a shake of the head. "The secret ramifications of crime are hard to follow. The rascals generally know one another. It was just accident this time that served the villains so well. By some means this colonel found out that the boy was in the house. The moment that fact was known to him, the rest was easy enough."

"Yes, yes; I see," said the merchant, thoughtfully. "Have you thought of a course of action?"

"The moment my eyes lighted on this fellow, I saw the road ahead, plain as the nose on my face," the detective answered, confidently. "The first thing is to keep an eye on this young man. That I'll leave to my partner, Hank."

"But, what is the object of that?"

"Why, don't you see?" asked Peters, in astonishment.

"No, I confess I do not," the merchant replied. "The fact is, Mr. Peters, I haven't been catching thieves all my life. You have a decided advantage of me there."

"Yes, rather. Well, the idea is this: the parties who carried off the girl will naturally want to know how much row you make about the affair, and what measures you take in the matter. They have instructed this young fellow to keep his eyes and ears open—to see and hear all he can. Then, to-night, he will meet them in some den and tell all that he knows. In possession of this information, they can judge what measures to take to defeat any attempt on your part to discover them or the girl. I'm putting the probabilities, you see."

"Yes. I understand now; you watch him that he may lead you to those who employed him."

"That's the idea exactly," replied the detective.

"Remember, Mr. Peters, money is no object so that you rescue the girl from the hands of these villains!" cried the old man, earnestly.

"I'll do my best, sir; never fear! I'll go down-town at once, and arrange with my partner to take up the scent. Hank will run Mr. Michael to the earth, unless he's a deal smarter chap than I take him to be."

Peters moved toward the door, when it opened suddenly, and John, the servant, entered with a card.

The same gent as came yesterday, sir," said John, presenting the card.

"Colonel Roland Peyton!" the merchant said, in amazement, as he gazed at the pasteboard.

For once in his life the keen detective looked utterly astonished.

"What shall I do?" asked Ollkoff, addressing the detective. The merchant was astounded at the visit.

"Why, have him shown in, of course," Peters replied, instantly. The detective had determined upon a plan of action, immediately.

John retired to usher in the colonel.

"I'll retire into the other room; the fellow is playing a bold game; we haven't got any common rascal to deal with here, sir; it will take all our wits to get the best of him!" cried Peters, rapidly, retreating as he spoke, through the door that led into the back parlor.

"But, what shall I say to this man?" demanded Ollkoff, who was completely bewildered.

"Hear what he has to say first; then say what you like in reply; it don't make much difference."

Peters disappeared, and the door closed just as John conducted the colonel into the parlor.

Peyton was gotten up regardless of expense, as usual. He bowed in a very dignified manner to the merchant, and a bland, self-satisfied smile was on his face.

John withdrew and closed the door.

"I trust that you are enjoying good health this morning," the colonel said, urbanely.

Ollkoff glared at the adventurer in rage; he could hardly restrain his passion; he hardly dared to trust himself to speak.

"As you have forgotten to ask me to be seat-

ed, I trust you will excuse me if I take a chair without waiting for an invitation," and the colonel sat down.

The merchant could hardly choke down his anger. The cool impudence of his visitor astounded him.

"Now then to business; I trust you will pardon any lack of ceremony on my part; business is business, you know," Peyton said, coming directly to the point. "Have you considered the proposition that I made to you yesterday? Are you ready to give me your answer?"

"Answer, sir!" exclaimed Ollkoff, making a great effort to subdue his rage.

"That is precisely what I said," replied Peyton, coolly. "Which is it to be, five thousand dollars or the girl?"

"You have the impudence to come here and put that question after what happened last night?" cried the merchant, in anger.

The colonel stared in amazement at this outburst of passion.

"Well, sir, I haven't the remotest idea to what you are alluding!" the colonel replied, astonishment in his face. "Of course, it is utterly impossible for me to guess what happened last night. If you will inform me, and explain in what way it concerns me, I shall be much obliged to you."

"Upon my word! I think you are the coolest rascal that I have ever seen!" cried Ollkoff.

"I am really much obliged to you for the favorable opinion that you have given of me," replied Peyton, not at all disconcerted. "But as I have once before remarked, to business. Which is it? your election—the money or the girl?"

"How can I give you the girl, sir, when you have already stolen her from me?" cried Ollkoff, in anger.

"What's that you say?" cried Peyton, springing to his feet.

"Your bluster won't avail you here, you infernal scoundrel!" cried Ollkoff, in wrath. "You abducted the girl from my house last night!"

"Do you mean to say the girl is gone?"

"You know she is gone, you villain!" and the merchant shook his clenched fist in the face of the colonel, who retreated a step at the menacing movement.

"Oh! I see your game!" cried Peyton, beginning to show signs of anger. "You have hidden the girl in spite of your promise not to do anything underhand. You won't beat me! I'll find the girl if she's a thousand miles away! Just you mark me, you shan't have her unless you pay five thousand dollars for her. You need keener wits than you have in your head, Obadiah Ollkoff, to measure strength with me." Then the colonel made a hasty exit from the house.

Peters re-entered the parlor.

"I don't know what to think!" he exclaimed; "I own up clean beat!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE WAY IT WAS DONE.

At ten o'clock on the evening previous to the morning when the events related in the preceding chapter took place, Lillian bid the girl, Mary, "good-night," and entered her apartment.

The gas was burning dimly, being turned down quite low.

Lillian closed the door behind her. Hardly had she taken her hand from the door-knob, when she was suddenly seized by the strong arms of a dark form who had been concealed behind the open door.

Before she could scream or struggle, a sponge saturated with chloroform was pressed upon her nostrils.

Vainly Lillian strove to free herself from the gripe of iron that made her prisoner; she attempted to scream, but a broad hand pressed over her mouth choked her cries.

Little by little her senses reeled under the influence of the powerful drug. A horrible sensation numbed her limbs and brain; it seemed to her as if she was under the influence of a terrible nightmare. The dimly-lighted room swam around before her staring eyes. Within her head a great wheel seemed to be whirling around with lightning speed; the hum sounded in her ears; growing more and more deafening each instant. A shower of sparks dazzled her eyes; the wheel's speed grew greater and greater; the grasp of iron seemed to hold her like unto the slimy coil of a gigantic serpent crushing the life from her body; a thousand deaths she died, all in that little instant, and then—all was a blank to her.

The potent drug has done its work; Lillian lay insensible in the arms of the dark form; helpless in the power of her enemy.

"Quick, Looney, git a shawl out of the closet for to put around her head," said the man who held the girl in his arms.

A second dark shadow, not quite so tall or as heavily built as the first, who had been concealed behind the closet door, obeyed the command.

The shawl was carefully wrapped around the girl's head.

"Now, git out into the entry an' jist let on when the way's clear."

Again the slighter-formed one of the two obeyed the command of the other.

Cautiously, he opened the door and stole out into the entry. The hall gas was burning, turned down low. No sound broke the stillness that reigned within the house.

Lifting the form of the girl from the floor, the ruffian approached the doorway.

"All O. K., eh?" he asked.

"Yes, there ain't a mouse stirring," the other replied.

Quietly, with cautious steps, the rough stole down the stairs, bearing the apparently lifeless form of the girl in his arms. The other rough closed the door of the girl's chamber, then followed his leader.

The two arrived at the front door.

"Look out into the street, Looney, and see if there's anybody in sight, and if there ain't, jist drive the wagon right up to the door. I don't want to carry this gal any further than I kin help; she's blasted heavy; jist like lead."

The man whom the other addressed as "Looney," opened the front door, descended the steps into the street and cast a hasty glance around. No one was in sight. Looney proceeded hastily to the corner of the street. A common covered wagon, such as are used by the grocers, stood there.

"Looney" jumped into the wagon and drove it slowly up to the door of the Ollkoff mansion. The wagon, being light, made but little noise, and just at the same moment a coach rattled through the street, so that the sound of the wagon-wheels and horse's hoofs were completely drowned.

The rough who held the insensible girl in his arms had been on the watch, and descended the steps just as the wagon drove up.

It was the work of a minute to deposit the girl in the wagon, jump in, and drive off."

"We're in luck to-night, anyhow!" cried the rough in triumph, as they turned into the avenue. "Not a 'cop' in sight, neither. Maybe somebody won't do some tall cussin' when they miss the gal to-morrow. Oh, no! not much, you know; not for Joe!"

"Looney" drove the horse, while the other one held the helpless form in his arms.

Lillian was still under the influence of the drug. With a careful forethought, the rough placed the girl on the seat between himself and his companion, supporting her in the sitting position by his strong arm. The head of Lillian, wrapped in the shawl, reposed on his broad shoulder.

"There," the rough muttered, "if anybody should take it into their heads to look into the wagon as we drives past, everything looks all right and reg'lar. The gal is sleepy—or sick—that's better! The sick dodge is the one for to play, in case anybody should take to askin' questions, which ain't none of their business. I'll git the chloroform ready, too; I may have to give her another dose if anybody should happen for to stop us, an' she gits over wot she's had already."

The plans of the ruffians were well laid.

Jolting over the rough stones and the cool air of the night had a tendency to rouse Lillian from the stupor into which the subtle influence of the powerful drug had thrown her.

It seemed to her as if she was awaking from a terrible dream.

Vainly she tried to recover her senses and remember what had taken place. All was confusion and disorder. Thought ran riot in her brain. One thing only was clear to her; terrible danger was hanging over her life. But she was powerless to prevent or to guard against it. She felt as if she was near to the borders of the grave. Strength and motion both were gone; she could not move hand or foot. She was helpless in the power of cruel enemies.

Onward still went the wagon. The horse was now going at a sharp trot.

"How cussed cold it is," muttered the rough, whose arm encircled the slender waist of the girl.

"That's so!" replied the other, emphatically. "this wind goes right through a feller. I'd like

for to take the shawl off the gal for to wrap round me."

"And leave her face unknivered nor any 'cop' for to see that she's been shanghaed? Not much now," growled the leader; "I ain't a-goin' for to have all this trouble for nothin', or go up the river to the stone jug, jist 'cos you wants to keep your precious karcass warm."

"I only said as how I'd like to," replied the other.

Just then they turned the corner into a narrow street that led to the river. The horse slipped down on the uneven stones and lay on his side without making an effort to rise.

"Cuss the luck!" cried the older rough, in anger. "Did anybody ever see'd any thing like that afore! Git down, Looney, and punch him up."

Obedient to orders, "Looney" jumped from the wagon and proceeded to try to get the horse upon its legs again; but the animal was not particularly accommodating in his disposition, and absolutely refused to budge an inch.

"He won't git up!" said Looney, in disgust.

"Kick him in the ribs! cuss him!" cried the rough, brutally.

But as he spoke, a new-comer appeared on the street. A stout, red-bearded man, wearing the blue uniform of the metropolitan police force, came round the corner and approached the wagon.

"Phat the devil's the matter wid yees?" questioned the policeman, with a rich brogue in his voice, which left no doubt as to the soil that gave him birth.

Looney's first impulse had been to take to his heels on the approach of the policeman, but a warning cry from the other rough stayed him.

"My boss has fallen down, and the cussed brute don't want for to git up," replied the leader, in the wagon. "If you'll be so kind as to give my young feller a lift, I'd be much obliged to you."

"Shure an' I'll do dat same. Be after takin' hould of his head, now. Git up, ye devil! ye murtherin' thafe of the wourld, will ye come out of dat?"

Under the combined efforts of the policeman and Looney, the horse at last was persuaded to stand up.

"Has he broke anything?"

"No," Looney replied.

The policeman had glanced with a curious eye into the wagon.

"Phat have yees there?" he asked.

"This is my sister," the rough answered readily.

"An' where are yees goin' at dis hour, anyhow?"

"You see, the gal is sick an' I'm takin' her to some folks of mine at Eastchester."

"Why don't yees go in the daylight like decent min?"

"Don't dare to—didn't I tell you she's sick?"

"An' phat the devil has that got to do with it, I'd like to know? The poor crathur 'll catch her death of cowl'd."

"Don't I tell you she's sick, an' I can't take her in the daytime?" cried the rough, impatiently.

"Sick is it? Phat is she sick wid?" questioned the policeman, approaching near to the wagon.

"Small-pox!" said the rough, mysteriously.

"By the holy poker!" and the policeman retreated in dismay. "Why the devil didn't ye say dat afore, ye murtherin' villain, ye! Maybe I've got it! Drive on, ye spalpeens! Go to the devil!"

The worthy officer retired in haste, muttering in indignation as he went.

A faint moan came from the pallid lips of the girl.

"Jump in, quick, Looney; we'll git up an' git, as fast as we kin!" cried the rough.

The other obeyed the command.

Again the wagon proceeded on its way.

The ruse of the rascals had succeeded completely. The policeman did not care to make any further inquiry about the "sick" girl.

The rough cast an anxious glance at the face of the girl, lifting the shawl that covered her head.

"She's all right! We've done the trick this time!" he cried, in exultation.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE IMPRISONED BIRD.

WHEN Lillian recovered her senses, she found that she was lying on a bed; all around was darkness.

For a few moments the girl could hardly realize what had taken place. Then the truth flashed suddenly upon her: she had been ab-

ducted! But by whom, or for what purpose, she could not guess.

She rose from the bed and peered around her, vainly striving to discover where she was.

When her eyes became accustomed to the gloom, she saw that she was in a small room, scantily furnished. To the right was a door; to the left, by the head of the bed, a curtained window.

Eagerly Lillian raised the curtain.

The first gray streaks of morning light were beginning to line the eastern skies.

The girl looked forth upon a vast extent of water, evidently a river running close to the house, for in the distance she could detect the dark line that denoted land.

The white sails of many vessels dotted the surface of the water.

The scene was strange to Lillian, but she guessed that she looked upon the waters of the sound, and that the opposite shore was Long Island.

Long and weary were the minutes that she waited until the daylight came. The head of the poor girl was aching terribly from the effects of the powerful drug that had been administered to her.

When the light became strong enough, Lillian examined the little window. It was fastened securely by nails. No chance of escape by opening it.

"Patience!" she murmured; "whoever has committed this outrage will come to see me soon. Perhaps I can learn then where I am. I may be many miles from New York."

So, having come to this conclusion, she sat down on the bed, and laying her head upon the pillow, strove to forget the peril which surrounded her.

A long, long time she rested, then she was suddenly disturbed by the door opening, and a tall, masculine-looking woman, with coarse and brutal features, entered the room. In her hand she carried a cup of steaming hot coffee, and a few slices of bread. These she put on a little table and drew the single chair that was in the room up to it.

"Here's your breakfast," the woman said, in a harsh, grating voice.

"Where am I?" demanded Lillian.

"Don't you worry 'bout that," replied the woman, with a coarse laugh.

"Why have I been carried away from my home?"

"Ax no questions an' I'll tell yer no lies; there's your breakfast, eat it and hold your tongue."

Lillian rose to her feet and made a movement toward the door, but the woman anticipated her design, and quickly placed herself before the entrance.

"No, you don't, my beauty!" she exclaimed; "you musn't try that on, 'cos it won't be healthy for you!"

"Do you think that you can keep me here?" demanded the maid, indignantly.

"Oh, I ain't got anything for to say about it," replied the woman, carelessly, "cept not for to let you get out of this room. There's somebody down-stairs that's a-puttin' up the job. If you want to see 'em, maybe they'll come up."

"I do wish to see them," said Lillian, firmly. "If they are not careful they may be made to repent this outrage. I've good friends, who will not see me wronged without attempting to right that wrong."

"You kin tell that to the cove wot bosses the job; I ain't got nothing for to do with it. I'll tell 'em that you want to see 'em." With this assurance the woman retired, closing the door behind her. Lillian heard the grating sound of the key turning in the lock. She fully realized that she was a helpless prisoner, but who her captors were she could not guess.

Again she went to the window and looked forth upon the water. The window was only some ten or twelve feet from the ground. A plan of escape flashed through the mind of the girl.

"If I could only open this window, I could easily jump from it to the ground," she murmured, as she noted the distance. "But if they should see me from the house? I know!" she cried, triumphantly as a bright thought flashed into her mind. "I will wait until it is dark; then, in the gloom, I may be able to make my escape."

The sound of heavy footsteps approaching the door of her room interrupted her thoughts. It was a man's tread.

The key turned in the lock, the door opened, and Rocky Hill, the bruiser, stood before her. There was a smile of exultation upon his brutal features as he looked upon the astonished girl.

"Good-mornin', my dear!" he said, with mock politeness; "I hopes I sees you well!"

"Rocky!" the girl murmured, in despair, all her old-time terror reviving at the sight of her ancient foe.

"The very idemical cuss!" cried Rocky, leering at the girl in a manner that made her sick at heart.

"You are the one, then, that has done me this cruel wrong!" Lillian said, slowly.

"You kin bet all your stamps on it," replied the rough, complacently.

"Why have you taken me from my home and friends?"

"Did you never hear tell as how little gals shouldn't ask questions?" demanded Rocky, enjoying the anguish of the girl. "But, in order for to relieve your mind, I don't know but what I'll tell you. Furst, and foremost, I don't like the way in which the little cuss took you away from the protection of Jocky. I made up my mind that I'd git square with him for that, an' I guess I've done it. I jist tracked you arter you left the saloon with him, an' the next day, too, I follered yer to that house up-town. Kind er a change from sellin' things on the Bowery," and Rocky chuckled at the idea.

"What do you intend to do with me?" asked Lillian, calmly.

"Now, that's puttin' the question sensible-like; you're improving, you are; gittin' to be quite a lady. I never see'd sich a change afore in all my life, an' I ain't no chicken, you bet!" said Rocky, in evident admiration. "Since you've axed the question, blame me if I don't answer it. I'm goin' to make a stake out of you, that is, me an' Jocky together."

"How can you do it?" Lillian asked, not able to guess the intentions of her abductors.

"Jist as easy as nothing at all," replied the rough. "Now, you see, Jocky's got a kind of a claim on you, 'cos he's looked arter you since you were a babby."

"Looked after me!" cried Lillian, her lip curling in contempt. "I have looked after myself since I was able to walk. He never spent a cent on me, that wasn't returned to him with interest."

"Well, that's what you think; now, Jocky thinks differently, an' I sides with Jocky, 'cos I can't make a stake unless I do. You see, I put the case to Jocky an' offered for to go in with him for to make a strike out of this old cove, wot has took you. I told Jocky it was a burnin' shame for him to have to lose you, just as you was beginning to make money for him. He 'greed with me; so, together we puts up a job for to carry you off, an' I flatter myself, we did the trick nicely. I'll bet a hat that the cutest detective in New York would be bothered for to foller you."

"That remains to be seen," Lillian said, quietly.

"Well, I'm blessed if you ain't changed!" exclaimed Rocky, astonished at her coolness. "As I said afore, you're gittin' to be quite a lady; learning for to keep your temper."

"You do not suppose that you can ever make me live with that brute again, his slave?" Lillian asked, a peculiar light shining in her dark eyes.

"Oh, no, that ain't our little game at all; we knows better nor that."

"Why have you stolen me away then?"

"For to make a stake."

"I do not understand."

"Clear as mud!" answered Rocky, with a hoarse laugh. "The old nob that wants to be a papa to you will feel awful cut up about your sudden disappearance. We'll let him fret for two or three days, an' then Rocky goes to him and says, quietly, that for 'stamps' he kin have you back ag'in. There it is plain enough. In course the old feller comes down with the green-backs, an' then we lets you go back to him. Ain't it nat'ral that the cove wot has been a second father to you, would want somethin' for to console himself for your loss, the little gal that he has always thought so much off?"

"But if Mr. Ollkoff puts the detectives on the track—as he will—and they discover me, your little game will not only be spoiled, but you will have an excellent chance of going to Sing Sing for a few years!" Lillian exclaimed.

"Don't you bet on that, 'cos you'll lose. There ain't a detective in the country smart enough for to drop onto me, or to find out this place," Rocky replied, contemptuously. "Got any idea where you are?"

"Yes; this is Long Island Sound," Lillian answered, pointing to the water, now dancing in countless ripples in the sunlight.

A scowl came over the face of the rough at the quick reply of the girl.

"You think so, do you?" he said, not over-pleased.

"I know so," she replied, confidently. His manner had told her that the guess had hit the truth.

"Well, you're a putty smart guesser; but you're a heap of miles from New York."

"Indeed?" The tone of the girl indicated disbelief.

"Yes; you're on an island off the Connecticut shore. You can't git to the main land without a boat, an' there's only one here, an' when I goes back, I takes that away with me. So, even if you got out of this house it wouldn't do you any good, 'cos you'd be caught ag'in, right away. I'm tellin' you this for your own good, 'cos if you cut up rough, it will only hurt yourself. You jist be satisfied to remain quiet here until the old gent comes down with the stamps, and then you kin go back to New York. You understand, don't you?"

"Yes, I understand." There was a hidden meaning in the simple sentence that Rocky did not catch. Satisfied, he left the room, locking the door carefully behind him.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LEAP IN THE DARK.

LILLIAN listened until she heard the footsteps of the rough dying away in the distance. A few moments she remained fixed as a statue, lost in thought. She felt sure that the rough had lied to her regarding the distance she was from New York.

"It cannot be possible that I could be carried so many miles—by railroad, of course—and then by boat transported to this island, without my knowledge. True, by means of a powerful drug they rendered me insensible, but it was about ten o'clock when I went to my room last night, and when I recovered my senses here, the daylight had not come. That proves that my swoon could not have lasted many hours. No; I feel sure that I am not many miles from New York, and when the night comes, I will make a desperate effort to escape from this place. Though I have grown to be quite a lady, in a few days, as Rocky says, he shall find that I have not changed in spirit in the least."

With this determination, Lillian sat down and eat up her breakfast. She knew that she would need all her strength in the attempt that she was resolved to make to escape from the hands of her captors, and fasting was not the way to preserve it.

Having finished the bread and coffee, she drew the chair to the window and amused herself by looking out upon the river.

Wistfully she watched the water-crafts sailing upon the bosom of the tide. She longed for the wings of a bird that she might fly far from her foes.

As she sat by the window, a little steamboat came puffing round the point, that ran out into the stream. She could just discern the name on the wheel-house as the steamboat passed.

"Sylvan Shore!" she murmured, in delight. "So, he did deceive me. I know that boat; she runs to Harlem. Then this house must be in New York. If I can only get out of this place and reach the street, the first policeman I meet will protect me. Escape from here!" and the girl sprung to her feet as she uttered the sentence; "I'll do it if I have to risk my life!"

The flashing eye, the firm, compressed lips, and the heightened color in her cheeks, told that she would keep her words.

Rocky, departing from the house, chuckling at the success of his plan and meditating how much he should require the old merchant to "come down" for the production of the girl, had no suspicion that Lillian had discovered the whereabouts of her prison-house. If he had had, it is not probable that he would have proceeded so gayly on his way.

Lillian spent all the morning in gazing out of the window, and in thinking over the means of escape.

At noon, the old woman who served as her keeper, brought up a scanty dinner. After placing it on the table, she examined the window, as if for the purpose of seeing whether the girl had tampered with it or not; but finding everything as she had left it, and being fully satisfied that Lillian had made no attempt to free herself, she left the room, locking the door after her as before.

Long and wearisome was the afternoon; the hours seemed to move on leaden wings; never before had the hours been so long to Lillian. Tired of sitting by the window and gazing out upon the freedom that was denied her, she paced up and down the room with the same

restless motion that characterizes the wild beast in its captive cage. She panted for the hour to come when she might make the attempt to break the toils that hemmed her in. She waited for night to wrap the earth in its sable mantle—for the gloom which was to hide her fleeing footsteps from the pursuer's gaze.

At last night came.

Slowly the gloom descended upon the earth. The white sails first seemed like spectral forms floating in the hazy air; then, slowly they faded from view as the mists of night closed in upon the heaving surface of the restless waters.

The opposite shore, far in the distance, became a dark, indistinct line: then the darkness crept over the rippling tide, that was shining gold, crimson and purple, reflecting the last rays of the dying day-god. The river faded from her sight. A dark, shadowy wall rose before her eyes, pierced here and there with twinkling stars, the lights shining from the opposite shore and from the passing vessels.

The hour was near at hand for the bold attempt for freedom. A faint hope had been in her mind that help might come ere night—help from the keen-eyed, quick-witted detective, John Peters. The only man in all the world who was to her a hero. Many a time during that long, weary day his image had risen before her. She had pictured him tracking her out, as the sleuth-hound scents its prey. But, night had come and no sign of rescue. Lillian was not disappointed, for she fully realized how difficult the task was. The ruffian who had carried her off was an adept in crime—one not likely to be easily tracked.

The woman brought in a cup of tea and some crackers for Lillian's supper, made a few remarks, saying how sensible she was to take her imprisonment quietly, and without making a fuss that wouldn't do her any good, anyway; then retired, taking care to lock the door after her, as usual.

The woman carried the light off, saying, grimly, that "folks slept better in the dark." It was evident she feared, that, if she left the light, her prisoner might set fire to the house, trusting to escape in the confusion.

Lillian sat down and eat her supper, though she had but little appetite, for the hour of escape was near at hand; that thought strangled hunger.

The meal finished, Lillian rose; she had decided upon the plan of action.

Quietly, little by little, inch by inch, she dragged the old bedstead out from the wall and shoved it against the door, using it as a barricade to prevent any one from coming into the room, as the door opened inward.

So skillfully did she perform this maneuver, that it excited no alarm among the inmates of the apartment below.

The door thus firmly barricaded, the girl tore down the curtain of the little window. With her hand she tested the strength of the woodwork. The window was one of the small, old-fashioned kind, common in the houses of forty years ago. The woodwork was light, but strong enough not to be broken by the mere strength of the arms alone. This did not disconcert her, for she had calculated upon it to be so.

She crossed the room, took up the chair, and approached the window. A moment she poised this chair in the air; then brought it down with all the force she could muster against the window-sash.

Crash went the glass, every pane in the window shattered into fragments by the shock. But the woodwork, though started from its place, still held.

Lillian heard a commotion in the room below. Her captors had been alarmed by the noise!

With desperate energy, she again struck the chair against the wooden bars that separated her from freedom.

The shock shattered the wood of the casement in the center, but it still held fast at the sides; the chair had broken, though; the upper part alone was now fit for a weapon.

Desperately, Lillian hammered at the stubborn wood, the courage of despair nerving every muscle in her frame. She heard, too, the rush of heavy feet upon the stairs and along the entry, leading to her door. The key turned in the lock, but thanks to the barricade of the bed, the door refused to open.

With desperate curses the ruffians—there was more than one—threw themselves against the door, striving to force it open.

Every blow that Lillian struck removed one obstacle to freedom. But, each moment now was precious. She could plainly distinguish that the ruffians were gradually forcing their way into the room.

Another desperate stroke and the shattered casement, freed from its fastenings, dropped to the earth, leaving an open space—an avenue to freedom.

With a cry of joy Lillian leaped upon the window-sill; at the same moment, the ruffians forced the door half open. Their hot curses rung in the ears of the girl, but boldly, without a moment's thought, she leaped fearlessly into the darkness.

A howl of rage burst from the lips of Rocky, who, with the Italian, Jocky, and young Donneharr—"Looney"—composed the party forcing open the door.

Succeeding at last in forcing open the door, they rushed into the room, just after Lillian had leaped from the window.

"Blast my eyes, if she ain't cut her lucky through the window!" cried Rocky, in disgust.

"Diavolo! We run quick after!" exclaimed the Italian.

"If she hasn't broke her leg she's lucky!" ejaculated Rocky.

The three rushed down-stairs and out of the door into the darkness of the night.

There was but one way she could have gone, for the house was surrounded by water on three sides.

"There she is!" cried Rocky as they ran toward the avenue. He had caught sight of the girl running toward the street.

The roughs redoubled their pace. They gained rapidly upon their victim.

Just as she reached the avenue they closed upon her. But the yell of triumph was choked in their throats, when a dozen blue-coated shadows sprung upon them from the darkness.

The roughs were surrounded by a squad of Metropolitan police, headed by the detective Peters!

In the twinkling of an eye the steel bracelets clasped the wrists of the three. The fortunes of war had changed. The hunters had turned into the game.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TURNING THE TABLES.

THE clock in Mr. Ollkoff's parlor had just chimed nine.

The merchant was pacing impatiently up and down. He had received a message from the detective that afternoon that he might expect to see Lillian before ten that evening, as he—Peters—was on the trail.

Ten minutes more and the girl, accompanied by the two detectives, stood in the parlor.

Ollkoff's joy was great, indeed; nor could he suppress his astonishment at the speedy success of the detective's plan.

"It was part accident, sir," Peters explained. "When I left the house this morning, after that colonel had been here, I was clean bothered. I felt sure that he had nothing to do with the affair. The first thing I did was to set Hank here to watch young Donneharr, as I was pretty sure that he was mixed up in it, someway. Then I suddenly remembered what a little bootblack had told me about this rough, Rocky Hill, that I rescued the girl from in the underground saloon. He watched me when I brought the girl here; the bootblack—a little fellow, named Shrimpy—watched him. Well, when I thought of this, it suddenly occurred to me that Rocky might have a finger in the pie. So I immediately set out to look up this rough. I couldn't find him anywhere, but I stumbled on Hank here, who was keeping an eye on young Donneharr, 'Looney,' as his pals call him; and, lo and behold! he and Rocky Hill came together. After that it was all plain sailing. We tracked Hill to the den in Harlem where he had carried Miss Lillian; went for a squad of police, and came just in time to nab the beauties as they were going to nab her."

"Mr. Peters, I don't know, sir, how I shall ever be able to reward you for this service!" exclaimed the merchant, warmly.

"Nor I," said Lillian, quietly, but with an earnestness in her tone and eyes that flushed the face of the detective crimson.

"I'm sure—I'm very much obliged—I—" and the cool, courageous thief-taker broke down and blushed like a woman.

Just at that moment John, the servant, entered the room.

"Colonel Peyton is at the door, sir," John announced, with a comical grin upon his face. It was very evident that the colonel had not made a very favorable impression upon him.

All within the room, except Lillian, started at the announcement. She had little idea of the nature of Colonel Peyton's business.

"John, tell him to call some other time!" cried the old merchant, hastily.

John turned, to find himself face to face with the colonel, who had followed him to the parlor.

"John, you needn't trouble yourself to do any thing of the kind," the adventurer said, blandly, smiling in the face of the astonished John. "And I am sure, Mr. Ollkoff, that you will see the necessity of meeting me to-night and thus spare unpleasant explanations."

There was a threat concealed under the colonel's smooth manner.

"Sir, I—"

"John, you may go," said the colonel, interrupting the merchant. "I see that you are determined that I shall speak out, and we might as well keep the family matter to ourselves."

John looked at the merchant; Ollkoff nodded his head, and John withdrew in profound astonishment.

After the servant had closed the door, the colonel spoke again.

"I trust you will excuse my somewhat abrupt entrance upon this little party; but, as I informed you this morning, Ollkoff, old boy, I am not to be 'done' easily; I'm a tolerably tough old chicken, and up to snuff. I dropped to your little game in spitting this young lady away. I knew that she would come back, sooner or later, and I made up my mind to watch this house until she did come back. So since I left you this morning, either myself or deputy has kept a devilish close watch upon this mansion. I confess it rather astonishes me to think that you thought me green enough to be thrown off the scent by such a shallow trick as this."

"May I be allowed to ask, sir, what you intend to do?" asked Peters, quietly.

"And who may you be, young man?" said the colonel, fixing his eye-glasses on his nose, and gazing superciliously at the detective.

"This gentleman's professional adviser."

"Oh, his lawyer, eh?" the adventurer said, contemptuously. "Perhaps it was your advice that put him up to this neat little trick, which wouldn't have deceived a green boy, let alone an old hand like myself."

"Let us proceed to business, sir; what do you want?" the detective asked, blandly.

"A certain sum of money, or that girl?"

Lillian started in astonishment. What meant this strange demand?

"And if we refuse?"

"I whistle—you see the little instrument?" and the colonel drew a silver whistle from his pocket. "My man who is waiting outside will summon a policeman to enforce my rights."

"Your rights?"

"Exactly, young man; my rights."

"If I understand this case correctly, only one man has any right in the premises—"

"Exactly; I am that man!"

"Impossible! you cannot be—"

"Harry Belford! But I am!" cried the adventurer.

"What?" and the merchant stared.

"Oh, you may look! Of course I've changed greatly; my yellow hair is now black; this hair-dye is a wonderful thing. You, Obediah, you're as gray as a badger, while I've kept my youth, despite the fact that I've led a life hard and fast enough to kill a dozen ordinary men."

"You think, then, that you can prove the right you assert?" the detective asked.

"What's the use of asking foolish questions? You know I can prove all I say. Ask Obediah, he's the only witness I want. Come, hand over the money, that's the only way."

"But if you are Harry Belford, how comes it that you are called Colonel Peyton?" Peters asked.

"Only a whim. A man has a right, I believe, to use any name he likes, as long as it is not used for an illegal purpose."

"Then you assert that you are Harry Belford, once a fellow-clerk with Mr. Ollkoff here, in the employ of the firm of Grainger & Co?"

"Yes, sir, I am Harry Belford. How many times do you want me to tell you so?" demanded the adventurer, arrogantly.

"I think you have said all that is necessary," Peters replied, a lurking devil in his eye.

"Hank, get the bracelets ready."

"You bet!" replied Hank, laconically, while, at the same moment, the colonel rose in alarm from his chair; he scented danger.

"Go for him," was Peters's curt command.

In a twinkling, Hank threw himself upon the adventurer, and before that worthy could recover from his surprise, or offer resistance, the steel handcuffs were clasped around his wrists.

"You shall answer for this outrage!" howled the adventurer, foaming with rage.

"Go slow," Peters rejoined, in sarcastic style. "Mr. Harry Belford, allow me to introduce myself: John Peters, detective officer. 'You're wanted.'"

"For—for what?" the adventurer asked, striving to appear calm.

"Forgery. The signature of the firm of Grainger & Co."

"You can not prove it!" gasped the baffled villain.

"Here's the bill. Mr. William Grainger is still living. No trouble at all to prove it, since you have confessed that you are the man. The identity question was the only weak point in the case."

"Mercy!" the adventurer cried, humbly.

"One condition. Sign an obligation giving up all claims to this young lady."

"I will!" he cried, quickly.

The handcuffs were removed, the deed drawn out, signed and witnessed; then with an angry look on his sallow face, the adventurer departed. He was never seen in New York again.

"I sent a friend of mine to see Mr. Grainger. Luckily this forged bill had been preserved," Peters explained.

Not until the next day did Lillian know the relationship that the heartless adventurer bore to her. Then the old merchant told her her history.

Just one week after these events took place, Peters was summoned to a private interview with the old merchant. Mr. Ollkoff spoke straight to the point.

"I wish to adopt Lillian, but she obstinately says 'no'; that she is your ward; and as you are a little young for a guardian, suppose that you become her husband, and settle it in that way?"

Need we relate the joy of the honest detective, who had learned to love the girl that he had saved? Lillian became his wife. A long life of wedded bliss seemed fair before them.

After a great many tearful speeches and earnest promises, Dolly Blake and Algernon Ollkoff won the old merchant's consent to their union, although, to the last, he declared that she was far too good for him.

Rocky Hill, Jocky, and the half-foolish lad, "Looney," are doing the State yeoman service at Sing Sing, breaking stone; and bitterly they curse the evil thought that tempted them to interfere in the fortunes of a Bowery Girl.

THE END.

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